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John Donne's epithalamia: The marriage of "text" and "context".

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JOHN DONNE'S EPITHALAMIA:

THE MARRIAGE OF "TEXT" AND "CONTEXT"

by

Kimberly Feyen

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ABSTRACT

John Donne's epithalamia, "Epithalamion made at Lincolnes Inne," "An Epithalamion, Or mariage Song on the Lady Elizabeth, and Count Palatine being married on St. Valentines day," and the "Epithalamion" for the Earl of Somerset, when compared to other groups of poems written by Donne, especially the *Songs and Sonets*, receive relatively little critical attention. Perhaps Donne's marriage songs are so often overlooked because they are believed to be restricted not only by the patronage system, but by the nature of the genre itself.

Because his wedding poetry is subject to the demands of the patronage system, many critics assume that it can in no way reveal an "authentic" or "individualistic" Donne. Similarly, because the epithalamic genre should not depict the real but only the ideal, critics presuppose that Donne's epithalamia are not context-bound or historical but, instead, "universal" or "mythological." As a result of these assumptions and presuppositions, the few critics who do study Donne's nuptial songs tend to misinterpret them or to subject them to narrow comparative studies in which authorial intention and the historical, sociological, and political contexts surrounding the poems are disregarded.

In this thesis, I have attempted to illustrate that, despite the tendency of critics to dismiss them as

"insincere" or "not credible," Donne's epithalamia are representative of both the time in which they were composed and their writer. Also, I have attempted to illustrate that to ignore the socioeconomic, the religious, and the political pressures which acted upon Donne, as well as Donne's own beliefs and preoccupations, is to ignore information necessary to a fuller appreciation of his wedding poetry. Although he draws upon and strictly adheres to a vast stockpile of conventional features, themes, and *topoi* used by both classical poets and Renaissance contemporaries, Donne adapts certain generic norms in order to illustrate his own attitudes and opinions, to communicate or to resolve anxieties characteristic of his society, and to comment on the particular wedding being celebrated.

DEDICATION

For my parents:
Thank you for your support, encouragement, and constant confidence in my abilities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my second and third readers, Dr. Wyman Herendeen and Dr. Charles Fantazzi, for their comments throughout the writing of the thesis. Your suggestions have been quite helpful. I would like to extend a special thanks to my Thesis Advisor, Dr. Henry Janzen, for his constant encouragement and words of comfort through multiple revisions.

INTRODUCTION

Critics such as M. Byron Raizis claim that "the genre of lyric poetry that has received the least attention is probably the epithalamion" (3). This is particularly so in the case of John Donne, for, as Heather Dubrow points out, Donne's epithalamia, the "Epithalamion made at Lincolnes Inne," "An Epithalamion, Or mariage Song on the Lady Elizabeth, and Count Palatine being married on St. Valentines day," and the "Epithalamion" for the Earl of Somerset,

> have hardly proved "an endlesse moniment." Anthologies seldom include them, and critics seldom analyze them. The most minor lyrics in the *Songs and Sonets* regularly receive more attention than the best of Donne's wedding poems, as scholarly bibliographies demonstrate. (*Eden* 151)

Perhaps Donne's marriage songs are so often overlooked because they are believed to be restricted not only by the confines of the patronage system, but by the nature of the genre itself.

Because his wedding poetry is subject to the demands of the patronage system, many critics assume that it can in no way reveal an "authentic" or "individualistic" Donne. Furthermore, because critics presuppose that the epithalamion does not or should not depict the real but only the ideal, they are led to conclude that Donne's epithalamia are not context-bound or historical but, instead, "universal" or "mythological." As a result of these

assumptions and presuppositions, the few critics who do study Donne's epithalamia either completely misinterpret them or subject them to narrow comparative studies. Donne's Somerset-Howard epithalamion "has appeared to centuries of readers and distinguished critics, as a hyperbolic encomium to the notorious couple" (Pinka 72). For instance, Thomas McLernon Greene suggests that Donne's "outrageous flattery" wafts away the bad air of this unwholesome marriage "on gusts of ethereal idealization" ("The Epithalamion" 209) and Arthur Marotti asserts that "the belated epithalamion Donne wrote to celebrate the scandalous Somerset-Howard marriage shamelessly depicts the degenerate Jacobean court as an ideal institution presided over by a just, liberal king" ("Rewards" 230). Similarly, the "Lincolnes Inne" epithalamion has been mistaken by critics, such as David Novarr and Celeste Schenk, to be a parody of Edmund Spenser's *Epithalamion.* Novarr even goes so far as to suggest that it was written for mock-nuptials held at Lincoln's Inn during mid-summer revels.

By merely cataloguing sources and influences, providing simple explanations of occurrences and images, and comparing epithalamic conventions used by Donne with those used by preceding or other contemporary writers of marriage songs, many critics such as Raizis, M.K. Lodi, and J.A.S. McPeek tend to state the obvious in terms of form and theme and to bury the individual character of Donne's own work within "a welter of learned and not altogether relevant comment"

(McGowan 176). I am not suggesting that Donne's epithalamia should not be placed within a tradition nor am I suggesting that classical and Renaissance conventions should be disregarded, but rather that the epithalamia should be examined also from a different perspective, that is, in terms of context. Attention must be called to the ways in which Donne transcends the genre through deviations from and alterations of accepted conventions.

Donne's epithalamia constitute part of a very long and pervasive literary tradition, which is believed to have begun as early as Hesiod in the eighth century B.C. and extends into the twentieth century with writers such as A.E. Housman, James Joyce, W.H. Auden, Edith Sitwell, and Dylan Thomas. Paradoxically, before we can appreciate the individuality of Donne's marriage poems, we must appreciate their indebtedness to that tradition. In other words, in order to understand how Donne employs and adapts certain epithalamic conventions, it is important to learn what these conventions are. However, it is also important to remember that the epithalamion began as a folk song rooted in contemporary wedding customs; that is, it was based originally on the actual events and rituals of the wedding day. Even though, as Virginia Tufte points out, "the nuptial poet soon began to derive inspiration as much from literary works as from the particular situation" (129), a study of only the literary tradition is insufficient. In order to understand more fully the significance of Donne's

epithalamia, it is necessary to examine both the literary and the extra-literary influences upon them, for "text" and "context" go hand-in-hand.

According to John T. Shawcross, "the use of a genre by a poet must occur for specific reasons" (23). However, while most critics (Paul Miller, Katharine Wallingford, Masoodul Hasan, and Greene, for example) agree that the epithalamion flourished in Stuart England, few critics (Heather Dubrow and, to some extent, Margaret McGowan) suggest possible reasons for this vogue. In Chapter I, I offer a general overview of the probable causes of the popularity of the epithalamion as well as the ways in which seventeenth-century epithalamists use conventional features, themes, and *topoi* in order to attend to the pressures of the patronage system and to resolve many of the tensions associated with "individualism," or the breakdown of the Renaissance ideologies of order and degree, and with the state of matrimony itself. This discussion serves as an introduction to the historical background of the epithalamic genre and to specific issues which will arise later in my examination of Donne's wedding poetry.

In Chapters II, III, and IV, I attempt to illustrate that the dismissal of Donne's three marriage songs as less "valuable" than his other poems because they fall into the category of occasional verse is unjustified. It is my contention that, when studied within the context which inspired them, Donne's epithalamia become both historical

texts illustrating societal turmoil and biographical texts illustrating Donne's own beliefs and preoccupations. For instance, through an examination of seventeenth-century fears, ideologies, and tensions, in conjunction with Donne's epithalamia, it becomes clear that Donne does more than simply regurgitate classical and Renaissance generic conventions; rather, he uses, disregards, and adapts certain epithalamic norms in order to communicate, suppress, and resolve anxieties characteristic of his society.

Similarly, through an examination of the biographical details from Donne's own life and through a comparison of his attitudes toward and preoccupations with sex, love, woman, and matrimony expressed in his other works with those found in the epithalamia, I shall demonstrate that an "authentic" or "sincere" Donne can be understood through his marriage songs. Certainly, the "Epithalamion made at Lincolnes Inne," composed during the 1590's (which is the date generally agreed upon by critics) by the satirizing, much more cynical student "Jack" Donne, differs significantly from both "An Epithalamion, Or mariage Song..." and the "Epithalamion" for the Earl of Somerset composed some eighteen years later by the married, mature, much more resigned Donne who was particularly desperate for patronage. Few critics place Donne's epithalamia within his own poetic career or compare them with his other groups of poems or his prose; however, many beliefs and fears found in the *Songs and Sonets*, the elegies, the satires, and the

sermons, which are believed by critics to reveal the "true" Donne, are illustrated in the epithalamia as well.

Lastly, through an examination of the specific circumstances surrounding, or the situation behind, each wedding, I will argue that Donne did include the actual in his epithalamia, despite the restrictions of the patronage system and of the genre itself. For example, the "Lincolnes Inne" epithalamion, which, as far as I can tell, was composed for no particular wedding, is both satiric as well as celebratory. Similarly, by taking advantage of the oddly ambiguous language of the past in the epithalamion for the wedding of the Earl of Somerset to Lady Frances Howard, a marriage surrounded by scandal, Donne is able to express both the real and the ideal. While "An Epithalamion, Or mariage Song...," which was created for James I's only daughter Elizabeth, whom Donne held in great esteem, illustrates, for the most part, the ideal, it does so only because the particular circumstances surrounding her wedding allow for it.

Before I begin the discussion of the ways in which Renaissance epithalamists used and adapted generic norms, it is useful to place Donne among his contemporaries in order to illuminate the use and transcendence of conventions in his wedding poetry and to acknowledge possible contributions he may have made to the epithalamic tradition. During the first three decades of the seventeenth century many different epithalamic traditions and styles were

represented. There were marriage songs written in classical, Christian, topographical, pastoral, epic, and allegorical traditions. There existed also during this time satiric epithalamia which were associated with popular ballads and often appeared in the drama of public theatres (Sheehan 150-51). These satirist-epithalamists, because of their dislike for the vain, traditional praise of "high wedlock" or the marriages of prominent members of the community, parody the excesses of current English love poetry, make jibes at court poets who write poems of extravagant praise for persons they do not even know, and mock the style of serious epithalamia (Sheehan 161-63). Despite all these styles, "the epithalamium in English had its greatest success as a nuptial lyric"[1] (Tufte 253). Among the more prominent lyric epithalamists writing in the seventeenth century are, of course, John Donne, Ben Jonson, Robert Herrick, and Richard Crashaw.

Because epithalamists writing during the seventeenth century were influenced not only by classical and medieval epithalamia, but also by those of their own contemporaries, many of the image clusters, motifs, and symbols which appear in Donne's marriage songs also appear in the works of other seventeenth-century epithalamists. The phoenix as symbol; the "perfection" theme; the conventional comparison between love-making and a battle; the image clusters of light, fire, heat, sunshine and sight, eyes, and tears; death and funeral imagery; and star and other astronomical imagery, some of

the elements shared by Donne and his contemporaries, will be given some attention here.

Although the use of the phoenix as symbol in the epithalamion began with the medieval poet Apollinaris Sidonius (430-83 A.D.), it does not seem to have become popular in Renaissance marriage songs until after its use by Donne as a symbol of sexual love (Montgomery 277). In his poem "A Nuptiall Song, or Epithalamie, on Sir Clipseby Crew and his Lady" (1625), Herrick uses the image of the phoenix in a manner similar to that of Donne. In this marriage song, which is demonstrative of what She han calls the "erotic" tradition[2], the phoenix is used to emphasize the bride's desires and desirability:

> See where she comes; and smell how all the street
> Breathes Vine-yards and Pomgranats: O how sweet!
> As a fir'd Altar, is each stone,
> Perspiring pounded Cynamon.
> The Phenix nest,
> Built up of odours, burneth in her breast.
> Who therein wo'd not consume
> His soule to Ash-heaps in that rich perfume?
> Bestroaking Fate the while
> He burnes to Embers on the Pile. (21-30)

Likewise, the phoenix in Crashaw's "Epithalamium" (1635) is used to celebrate marital sexuality. The immortal bird, which rises from a funeral pyre of its own making, represents both the death of the bride as maiden and the rebirth of the bride as matron which, in Crashaw's opinion, is a superior state:

> Yet Love in death did wayte upon her,
> granting leave she should expire
> in her fumes, and have the honour
> t'exhale in flames of his owne fire;

her funerall pyle
the marriage bedd,
in a sighed smile
she vanished.
So rich a dresse of death nere famed
the Cradles where her kindred flamed;
so sweet her mother phaenixes of th'East
nere spiced their neast. (61-72)

In his very formal "Epithalamion; or A Song Celebrating the Nuptials of that Noble Gentleman, Mr. Hierome Weston, Son, and Heire, of the Lord Weston, Lord high Treasurer of England, with the Lady Frances Stuart, Daughter of Esme D. of Lenox deceased, and Sister of the Surviving Duke of the same name" (1628?), Ben Jonson uses the image of the phoenix in a manner different from Donne, Herrick, and Crashaw. In this poem of panegyric, Jonson comments on the superiority of man to all creatures and the inadequacy of the phoenix to represent the bridal pair which is the model of perfection for the rest of the human race:

Force from the Phoenix, then, no raritie
Of Sex, to rob the Creature; but from Man,
The king of Creatures, take this paritie
With Angels, Muse, to speake these: Nothing can
Illustrate these, but they
Themselves to day,
Who the whole Act expresse;
All else we see beside, are Shadowes, and goe lesse.
(81-88)

The use of the "perfection" theme, which may have been introduced into the epithalamic tradition by Donne in his "Lincolnes Inne" wedding poem, was also prominent among seventeenth-century epithalamists. Jay Halio writes:

> According to Aristotle, the female in the act of conception contributes the material cause, while the male contributes the form and efficient cause, or 'principle of motion.'...This power of the male is to

> impart the sensitive soul, without which the embryo remains imperfect....This function, then, is to *perfect* the work of generation in the way indicated. (179-80)

Thus, indirectly, women receive perfection through matrimony, marital consummation, and conception. As it is in Donne's "Lincolnes Inne" epithalamion, this idea of perfection is a central theme throughout Jonson's Haddington masque and its concluding epithalamion. In both epithalamia, the superiority of the married woman to the virgin is emphasized through the poet's use of the refrain:

> *To day* [or, *To night*] *put on perfection, and a womans name.* (Donne 11)

> But, that in HYMENS warre,
> You perfect are.
> And such perfection, wee
> Doe pray, should bee. (Jonson 432-35)

Similarly, in his epithalamion for Hierome Weston, Jonson touches upon the perfection theme:

> It is the kindly Season of the time,
> The Month of youth, which calls all Creatures forth
> To doe their Offices in Natures Chime,
> And celebrate (perfection at the worth)
> Mariage, the end of life,
> That holy strife,
> And the allowed warre:
> Through which not only we, but all our *Species* are. (25-32)

The convention of love-making, or of the transformation of the bride from maiden to matron, as a battle or as violent and harmful to the bride present in Donne's "Lincolnes Inne" marriage song, in which the bride as a "pleasing sacrifice" (75) is laid upon "loves altar" (74) to wait for her groom "t'embowell her" (90), is also found in Jonson's Haddington--"HYMENS warre"--and Weston--"the

allowed warre" (31)--epithalamia. Similarly, in his "Epithalamium," Crashaw writes of the consummation as a type of "war" in which the bride is somewhat reluctant to engage:

> With many pretty peevish tryalls
> of angry yeelding, faint denyings,
> melting No's, and milde denyalls,
> dying lives, and short lived dyings;
> with doubtfull eyes,
> halfe smiles, halfe teares,
> with trembling joyes,
> and jocund feares;
> Twixt the pretty twylight strife
> of dying maide and dawning wife;
> twixt raine, and sun-shine, this sweet maydenhead
> alas is dead. (73-84)

Also present in all of these poems is fire, heat, light, and sun imagery. References to flames and ashes go hand-in-hand with the use of the phoenix and are often used, as they are in Donne's Somerset-Howard epithalamion, to communicate the beauty and the sexual desires of one or both marital partners. For instance, in Jonson's Weston-Stuart epithalamion, the "chast desires" (161) of marriage are called "Sweet, and Sacred fires" (163); in Crashaw's "Epithalamium," the "fruite of faire desire.../ flourisheth in mutuall fire" (33-34); and in Herrick's marriage song for Clipseby Crew, the groom's desires are "More towring, more disparkling" than Hymen's fires (36). Furthermore, there are many references to the sun (and to the east), which is usually indicative of the time of day and the season of the year and is used often as a symbol for the monarch, as it is in both Donne's Somerset-Howard epithalamion and Jonson's Weston-Stuart epithalamion.

Similarly, the use of image clusters of sight, eyes, and tears is quite common. In Donne's Somerset-Howard epithalamion, for example, the bride and groom have "inflaming eyes" and the bride must shed "a Teare" (147) of joy and, in Crashaw's "Epithalamium," the bride and groom become "a mutuall sacrifice/ of eithers eyes" (131-32) and the bride's eyes are described as "watry" (87) and "moist" (104).

References to death and the grave, which are, again, usually connected to the phoenix's death and rebirth or to the sacrifice of the virgin upon the marital altar, and to jealousy are also commonplace in many seventeenth-century epithalamia. For example, in Jonson's Weston-Stuart epithalamion, the bishop knits

> ...the Nuptiall knot,
> Which Time shall not,
> Or canker'd Jealousie,
> With all corroding Arts, be able to untie! (133-36)

Similarly, in Herrick's marriage poem for Crew, the bride is "wise,/ In dealing forth these bashfull jealousies" (51-52) and in his Somerset-Howard epithalamion, Donne attributes the "unjust opinion" (123) of the multitude to "envies Art" (124).

Finally, references to stars are numerous in seventeenth-century epithalamia. For instance, in Donne's Elizabeth-Palatine and Somerset-Howard marriage songs, the bride is compared to a star. In his nuptial poem for Clipseby Crew, Herrick writes of the "quintiscence/ Of

Planetary bodies" (156-57) and of "faire *Constellations*" (158), and, in the refrain of his Haddington epithalamion, Jonson prays for the arrival of the evening star: "Shine, HESPERUS, shine forth, thou wished *starre*." Of course, the popularity of star imagery has much to do with its use by Catullus, "the most important author in the classical tradition and the most significant to the English genre" (Tufte 21), in "Carmen 62." However, no doubt, star and, indeed, all astronomical imagery was popular in the Renaissance partially because of the development of the telescope by Galileo in 1609 (Raizis 5).

From the brief discussion above, it becomes apparent that very few image patterns and themes are exclusive to Donne; however, while he adheres strictly to both classical and Renaissance conventions, Donne does far more than simply reiterate what has already been written. Each of these image patterns and themes takes on a distinctive quality in Donne's epithalamia, depending on the particular message he wishes to convey. With a general understanding of many of the seventeenth-century conventions which will be discussed in greater detail in my examination of Donne's wedding poetry, attention can now be turned to the importance of the epithalamic genre in the Renaissance.

CHAPTER I
THE EPITHALAMIC GENRE IN THE RENAISSANCE

The vogue the epithalamion enjoyed in the seventeenth century may be attributed, in part, to the success of Spenser's *Epithalamion*; to the fact that the most respected rhetoricians of the Renaissance, Julius Caesar Scaliger, George Puttenham, and Thomas Wilson,[1] prompted poets to write marriage songs according to provided guidelines; and to the very nature of the epithalamion, which "lends itself to the synthesis of classical and Christian concepts in which Renaissance authors delighted and excelled" (Tufte 3). However, the epithalamion also flourished because it performed vital societal functions. Through its insistence upon the doctrines of order and degree, the epithalamion created the illusion that the social, economic, political and religious upheavals of the seventeenth century posed no threat to the status quo. Furthermore, the fact that the epithalamion's identification with and supposed idealization of the upper class made it an exceptionally effective poem of patronage no doubt contributed to its popularity. In addition, in a society where attitudes toward marriage itself were characterized by contradiction and ambiguity, the epithalamion, which addresses and attempts to resolve anxieties related to matrimony, was almost a necessity.

i) Renaissance Ideologies

Renaissance society was based upon the concepts of

order and degree:

> Hierarchy and organic unity were the two predominant postulates upon which contemporaries constructed their government. As the universe was ordered in a great chain of being, so the nation was regulated by obedience to a hierarchy of superiors leading up to the King, so society was composed of various estates of men all settled and contented in their degree, and so the family was ordered by subservience of wife and children to the *pater familias*. Whether in heaven or hell, in the universe or on earth, in the state or in the family, it was a self-evident truth that peace and order could only be preserved by the maintenance of grades and distinctions and by the relentless emphasis on the overriding need for subjection of the individual will to that of superior authority. (Stone, *Crisis* 15)

However, while much of the population adhered to these two predominant postulates, "during the early seventeenth century these authoritarian attitudes were having to compete with what can only be described, for lack of a better word, as the concept of individualism" (Stone, *Crisis* 21). The ideal of Renaissance society "in which every man had his place and stayed in it was breaking down under a combination of material and ideological pressures" (Stone, *Crisis* 21). The forces undermining traditional beliefs and contributing to "individualism" are numerous and complex and certainly cannot receive adequate treatment here; however, for our purposes, an understanding of the ways in which the epithalamion, by its very nature, circumvents these pressures, many of which appear in Donne's epithalamia, is helpful.

Because of the atmosphere of anarchy created by "individualism," "unification must have seemed especially attractive--and especially urgent--in the early seventeenth

century" (Dubrow, *Eden* 57); therefore, it makes sense that the epithalamic genre, one which projects and, thus, promotes the ideologies of hierarchy and organic unity[2] and supports the existing society, flourished. As Dubrow points out, epithalamia

> dramatically enact what is at once the overt social blue-print of this genre and its covert core fantasy: the vision of a culture in which diverse and conflicting individuals and forces form a cohesive and harmonious whole *[concordia discors]*. (Dubrow, *Eden* 57)

Although there were always deviations from the norm, the typical version of the epithalamion has, since classical times, depicted a community happily and harmoniously celebrating a marriage: "not only do all members of the culture join the festivities, but they do so willingly fulfilling the roles assigned to their station" (Dubrow, *Eden* 59). For instance, in Catullus's "Carmen 61," which may be considered the handbook of themes and poetic techniques for Renaissance epithalamists (Tufte 26), the boy or concubine strews nuts (126-40), the *praetextatus* leads the bride to bed (181-85), the *pronubae* or matrons undress the bride (186-90), and the poet leads the procession and conducts the celebrations (Greene, "The Epithalamion" 38-39). In the fictional setting of the epithalamion, the marriage being celebrated "represents a triumph of order, a social order, over the discordant individual will which rebels against it" (Greene, "The Epithalamion" 48).

Through the almost ritualistic use of marriage as a symbol of unity and peace in the state, introduced by

Aristophanes in the marriage songs found at the end of his comedies *Birds* and *Peace* (Tufte 14), the epithalamion creates the illusion of not only communal or societal, but national harmony as well. Furthermore, as George Parfitt points out, the conflict and uncertainty felt during the seventeenth century, along with the belief that the world was deteriorating with time, encouraged the contemplation and representation of stability associated with an ideal past (11). Thus, the concept of the lost golden age begun by Catullus in "Carmen 64" (382-408) and the "nostalgic and recuperative mode that characterizes the tradition" (Dubrow, *Eden* 125) became popular in English Renaissance epithalamia.

Through a number of other classical conventions, the epithalamion also creates an illusion of earthly and cosmic harmony. Wedding poetry links the human, natural, and universal realms[3] through the summoning and the affirmation of the presence of human, mythological, and natural figures, begun by Sappho and perpetuated by the epic epithalamists Statius and Claudian; the use of nature comparisons and the pastoral setting, exemplified by Theocritus's "Idyll 18"; the assertion that procreation is in accord with nature; the parallels between the movement of heavenly bodies such as the sun and stars and the movement of the events of the wedding day and night, manifest in Spenser's *Epithalamion*; and "numerological patterning establishing parallels between poetic, human, and natural rhythms" (Dubrow, *Eden* 36).

In addition, epithalamia promote societal, earthly, and

cosmic concord through the suppression or, more importantly, the resolution of evil forces which pose a threat to the unity of both the couple and the state. For instance, through the use of the *fescennina iocatio*, or the "wanton jests believed to ward off evil to which man is most susceptible in time of good fortune" (Tufte 23), and the *allocutio*, or the address to the bridal couple which consists of good wishes for the future and the all-important wish for progeny (Greene, "The Epithalamion" 20), conventions which were introduced by Sappho and elaborated upon by Catullus in "Carmen 61," the epithalamion attempts to cast off evil forces through mockery, blandishment, and admonition (Greene, "The Epithalamion" 40). The triumph of order over the discordant elements which oppose the happiness of the couple and the nation is seen everywhere in Renaissance epithalamia. For instance, in all three of his wedding poems, Donne attempts to emphasize procreation and immortality, which were considered to be the proper results of marriage, by pitting them against the forces of death.

ii) The Patronage System

Throughout the classical tradition, the epithalamion most often celebrated royal or noble weddings--Statius and Claudian, for example, commemorated the weddings of emperors and aristocrats--and throughout the Renaissance, rhetoricians insisted that the marriage song should be written as a panegyric of "high wedlock," which "portrays

eminent characters and notable events," and in the "grand style," which "contains the qualities of dignity and sonorousness" (Sheehan 9-10). The genre's identification with the upper class took on special significance for seventeenth-century poets who wished to benefit from a complex system of patronage. Generally, for these epithalamists, "the weddings which [were] distinguished enough to be celebrated in verse [were] the weddings of people wealthy enough to reward the poet and prominent enough socially and politically to justify, so to speak, his encomia" (Greene, "Spenser" 218). Therefore, it makes sense that "by the year 1613, which contained two important court weddings, the epithalamion was at the peak of its popularity to the extent that almost every court rhymer tried his hand at one" (Greene, "The Epithalamion" 204). Oftentimes, the poet expressed his humility and informed his reader of his lower social status through the claim that he was unworthy and, thus, unable to celebrate properly the specific marriage at hand, a technique which works particularly well in Donne's Somerset-Howard epithalamion. Therefore, through the exclusive praise of the nobility in his marriage songs and the representation of himself as a lower-class citizen, the poet reinforces "the validity and rightness of the hierarchical system he celebrates" (Hurley 365).

Although the affirmation of hierarchy contained in the epithalamion was primarily beneficial to the nobility, it was also useful to the poet, for the very act of recording

the virtues of the great meant not only a desire to emulate them, but a sharing in them (McGowan 203-04). Through the creation of the marriage song, the epithalamist marks himself, as Donne does in his Elizabeth-Palatine wedding poem, as a "social participant in the elaborate courtly ceremonials rather than as a poet composing deferential complimentary verse on the fringes of that social world" (Marotti, *Coterie* 271-72). Furthermore, through his role as participant, the poet creates the illusion that he commemorates the union out of genuine enthusiasm rather than pure self-interest (Dubrow, *Eden* 138-39). More importantly, through the conventional role of master-of-ceremonies, initiated by Sappho in the seventh century B.C. (Tufte 9), he creates the illusion of self-importance and power for writers of wedding poetry, "for in the fictive world of the poem they themselves guide the events of the wedding" (Dubrow, *Eden* 139-40). The invocations to specific individuals involved in the wedding, including the bride and groom themselves, can be understood as either commands or requests allowing the poet "to assert his authority while providing his patron with the illusion that the author is admitting his subordination" (Dubrow, *Eden* 146-47).

James I strongly favoured and actively promoted marriages, used wedlock in his own writings and speeches as a metaphor for political, social, and religious concord, and even wrote an epithalamion in 1588 as part of a wedding masque (Tufte 156); therefore, commemorating weddings must

have seemed a particularly efficacious route to advancement. Throughout his reign, James I emphasized his role as *rex pacificus*, the royal peacemaker. Upon his coronation in 1603, King James claimed that among the blessings God sent with his person were "outward Peace," that is peace with foreign neighbours such as Spain (*Political Works* 270), and "Peace within, and that in a double form," for King James united not only the Houses of Lancaster and York, but the kingdoms of England and Scotland (*Political Works* 271). As Parry points out, union took on

> mystical significance for the king. The concept of kingdoms united by his will and in his person gave him a metaphysical pleasure, for it revealed the mysterious powers of kingship that he alluded to so often, while the historical fact of union was so remarkable that it could only be explained as an act of God's providence working through his chosen instrument, King James. (10)

King James often expressed the harmony he believed himself to embody and to have created through metaphors of marriage. For example, in his speech of 1603, James says,

> What God hath conjoined then, let no man separate. I am the Husband, and all the whole Isle is my lawful Wife; I am the Head, and it is my Body; I am the Shepherd, and it is my flock: I hope therefore no man will be so unreasonable as to think that I that am a Christian King under Gospel, should be a Polygamist and husband to two wives; that I being the Head, should have a divided monstrous Body; or that being the shepherd to so fair a flock (whose fold hath no wall to hedge it but the four Seas) should have my flock parted in two. (*Political Works* 272)

Likewise, these metaphors were used frequently by poets and preachers who wished to ingratiate themselves with King James and "even the coinage helped to circulate these themes, for James introduced a new coin called the 'unite,'

and had a phrase from the marriage ceremony stamped on his crown pieces" (Parry 19).

During his reign, James I actively arranged a number of marriages and, in keeping with his role as kingly peace-maker, often encouraged unions between members of rival factions and between citizens of England and those of Scotland. For example, in 1606, King James arranged the marriage of Lady Frances Howard to Robert Devereux, the third Earl of Essex, to unite two opposing houses. Similarly, he actively promoted Lady Frances's divorce from Essex and her remarriage to Robert Carr, Viscount Rochester, James's Scottish favourite (the details of this divorce and remarriage will be given in full later). King James took an active part in the marriages of his own children as well. Although Prince Henry died before he was married,[4] he was expected at one time to wed a daughter of Charles Emmanuel, Duke of Savoy, to ensure peace with the Catholic countries; his daughter Elizabeth was married to the Elector Palatine in order to form an alliance with the German Protestant Princes (the details of this wedding will be discussed later as well); and his son Charles, later King Charles I, was married to Henrietta Maria in order to bind a treaty with France against Spain (Strong 60). No doubt, James's pre-occupation with marriage contributed immensely to the epithalamic vogue of the seventeenth century.

Most poems of the seventeenth century are in some way poems of patronage; however, in occasional verse, which is

composed to praise a particular patron at a particular time "more or less by command, by inescapable request or by social and political pressure" (Milgate xxi), extravagant praise is accepted and indeed expected.[5] Therefore, the epithalamion, which is, in its most basic form, "specifically dedicated to the celebration of the ideal in the actual, in explicit rejection of the actual" (Hurley 364), was an extremely effective occasional genre for poets of the seventeenth century. The faults and imperfections of both the wedding day and the circumstances surrounding the union were to be suppressed or ignored, for as Greene claims, "the aristocratic milieu which produced the epithalamion did not tolerate the impingement of 'actual' upon 'ideal' much before the second quarter of the seventeenth century" ("The Epithalamion" 210-11).

As the imperfections of the wedding day and of the circumstances surrounding the wedding are ignored, so are the faults of the bridal couple. A "corollary of this idealization of the married couple is the virtual extinction of their identities as individuals" (Greene, "Spenser" 221): the bride and bridegroom are almost faceless despite extensive description (Tufte 27). Poets of the seventeenth century, and Donne in particular, are able to transcend human limitations through the use of what Barbara Keifer Lewalski calls "symbolic praise,"[6] which is "not praises judiciously evaluating the specific virtue and characteristics of the individual, as Ben Jonson's often

are, but metaphysical praises of the possibility of the human spirit acted upon by God" (49). While the use of "symbolic praise" may have benefited poets of the seventeenth century who were desperate for patronage, it has done little for the credibility of the epithalamic genre as a whole. Because of the idealization of the bridal couple, the particular wedding, and the institution of marriage (all of which will be discussed later), most epithalamia are considered "insincere," "inflated," or "not authentic" (McGowan 175) and are, therefore, so often overlooked by critics. However, as I shall show in later chapters, this dismissal of marriage songs, and those of Donne in particular, is unjustified.

iii) Attitudes Towards Marriage

As a result of the social, political, economic, and, most importantly, the religious upheavals mentioned above, in both Tudor and Stuart England, "attitudes towards marriage [were] characterized above all by contradictions, ambivalence and flux" (Dubrow, *Eden* 14). As Keith Wrightson points out, marriage "was in reality far more complex and far less homogeneous than was allowed for by the conventional definitions of moralists or the neat prescriptions of the law" (67). There was confusion about the status of marriage and women, the value of sexuality, the extent to which marriage was public or private, sacred or secular, the manner in which a spouse was chosen and the

criteria upon which that choice was based, the constitution of a civilly and spiritually binding marriage, and the grounds for divorce. Numerous marriage manuals, which were virtually unknown in medieval times, were published in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in order to stabilize or make consistent the differing opinions about wedlock (Dubrow, *Eden* 10). However, writers of these marital treatises probably only caused more confusion as they continually contradicted others and themselves. The epithalamion, like the domestic conduct book, was a product of conflict and it "flourished in Stuart England precisely because many of its generic norms lent themselves variously to expressing or suppressing the problems associated with wedlock" (Dubrow, *Eden* 3).

During medieval times, because of the belief that virginity was a higher spiritual state than matrimony, the state of wedlock suffered disparagement:

> The view of marriage of Thomistic Catholicism is readily defined in terms of the double standard of morality which we have found to occupy so important a place in medieval Roman Catholic philosophy. This double standard grants to the religious life, and especially the monastic life, a higher spiritual value *per se* than to the life of the world; and the religious life, whether monastic or ecclesiastical, is properly celibate. In consequence, marriage automatically becomes, even at best, a concomitant of a lower, less demanding, and spiritually less rewarding type of Christian life. (George 261-62)

As a result of the attitudes discussed in this passage and the subsequent defamation of marriage, along with the popularity of ascetic interpretations of the *Canticles*, or the

Songs of Solomon, and the *45th Psalm*, which were believed by biblical scholars to be the first wedding poetry written (E. Faye Wilson 40), the epithalamion of the Middle Ages was no longer a pagan glorification of secular love but, instead, a Christian devotional poem celebrating the marriages of Christ and the Church and of the human soul and God (E. Faye Wilson 40-41).[7]

Unlike its Catholic counterpart, the Protestant Church claimed that marriage was as worthy, or even worthier, than the celibate state. William Perkins, for instance, calls marriage "a state in itself far more excellent than the condition of a single life" (quoted in Stone, *The Family* 135). Unlike the Catholic, who grudgingly defended marriage as a means to ease the human burden of concupiscence or as a remedy for sin (George 262), the Protestant, more precisely the Puritan, had a very practical and rational world-view and came to realize the importance of marriage and a family for the individual:

> The family became the key to fulfilling the awesome goal of the Protestants: that ordinary men and women should make a total commitment to a godly life in both their public and most intimate acts, in their daily utterances and secret thoughts. (Hamilton 53-54)

The function of marriage and the motives to marry were also reinterpreted by Protestants. While Thomistic Catholics placed emphasis on the reproductive aspect of marriage, Protestant preachers, on the other hand, although they did not ignore this aspect, "almost always [coupled] with this service at least an equal and often superior

emphasis upon the importance of companionship between a man and wife" (George 269). The interdependence of the partners as well as the mutual respect and affection they should feel for one another were stressed (Schuking 47-49).

Attitudes toward sexual relations between a husband and his wife were adjusted accordingly. No longer was sexuality reserved only for procreation, an evil necessary for the propagation of the race, but was seen as a means to comfort and love one another. While Puritans were much more severe than their Catholic counterparts when it came to extra-marital chastity, they were much more tolerant of marital sexuality. Physical love within a marriage was considered pure, and often sexual intercourse which was confined to a faithful marriage was included in the definition of continency. John Calvin, for example, wrote that "the second kind of virginity is the chaste love of matrimony" (Frye 150). Instead of emphasizing biblical passages, such as I Corinthians 7: 1-2 and 32-35, which praise virginity at the expense of marriage, Protestant preachers such as Henry Smith, William Whately, and William Gouge emphasized biblical passages such as I Corinthians 7: 3-5, which is dedicated to the discussion of "due benevolence" or the "marriage debt" (Frye 154). As Schuking points out, the Middle Ages were governed by the belief that spiritual and sensual love were mutually exclusive; however, for the Puritans, these two types of love co-existed in a healthy marital union (37-38).

Marriage had always held a fundamental importance in England, for as Stone writes, "among the upper and middling ranks it was primarily a means of tying together two kinship groups, of obtaining collective economic advantages and securing useful political alliances" (*The Family* 5); however, as a result of the Reformation, marriage took on greater significance. More and more, Puritans believed that marriage was instituted by God in Eden to be the "fountain" of all other forms of existence (George 267). As Jonathan Goldberg points out, the family, which was the desired effect of marriage, was understood as "part of a larger world,... as the smallest social unit from which the larger world was composed..." ("Fatherly Authority" 7-8). Therefore, the home was not considered to be, as it is today, an "introspective, private sphere, unmindful of society, but the cradle of citizenship, extending its values and example into the world around it. The habits and character developed in families became virtues that shaped entire lands" (Ozment 9).

Family dynamics came to represent the workings of the commonwealth as a whole: "as marriage laid the foundation of household government, family life in turn imparted to a new generation the values by which society at large was governed" (Ozment 8). The idealized structure of the family, which included the husband and father as political leader corresponded to and, thus, served to reinforce the structure of the absolutist state: "the man was called to

rule over his wife and family just as the king was called to rule over his people, and he was by nature granted greater gifts, corresponding to the greater service demanded of him" (Haller 248). Furthermore, as a result of Luther's doctrine of "the priesthood of all believers" which "denied the need for mediator between man and God, who alone could perform the miracle of the mass" (Hill, *Century* 83), the family became divorced from an ecclesiastical hierarchy and the father took on the role originally filled by a priest. He became responsible for the religious instruction and the moral conduct of his family (Stone, *The Family* 154). Therefore, the family was considered to be not only "a little commonwealth," but "a little church" as well.[8]

Because the status of the institution of marriage improved greatly in Protestant England--if not in actuality, at least in theory--it makes sense that the epithalamion became, once more, the celebration of earthly rather than mystical union: the "humanism of the Renaissance, fostering the conviction that virginity is a heavenly state but marriage a human one, provided a favorable climate for the re-development of the classical epithalamium" (Tufte 255-56). However, the effects of the Reformation did not take place immediately and, despite its seeming resistance to the doctrines of Catholicism, the "English Protestant attitude toward marriage and the whole area of sexuality is not a matter of simple unqualified statement" (George 265). For example, the idea of immoderate love or lust, which was

considered to be "not merely evil in itself but the source of many other evils" (Frye 157) and, thus, was believed to disrupt the social order (George 272), concerned many Puritans. Furthermore, there existed within popular opinion much diversity of thought concerning the relative worth of the states of matrimony and celibacy: writers of marital handbooks contradict each other and themselves throughout the literature. For instance, while Protestants supposedly rejected vows of virginity or forced celibacy of the clergy, "some still clung to a fairly clear preference for virginity as a more suitable condition for the individual with a special religious gift" (George 266). Even *The Book of Common Prayer* attests to the belief that while marriage was considered to be "an honourable estate, instituted by God in the time of man's innocency," it was also considered to be "ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body" (Booty 281). Schuking also suggests that Queen Elizabeth and her "Cult of the Virgin" must have added to already ambivalent attitudes toward wedlock (22). This tension between Catholic and Protestant attitudes toward marriage and love relationships must have been intensified in the case of Donne, who was raised a Catholic but who must have known that only a Protestant could advance in his society.

As mentioned previously, through the conventions and

norms they inherited from the epithalamic tradition, writers of marriage songs attempted "variously to repress, reinterpret, and resolve the dangers and fears associated with wedlock" (Dubrow, *Eden* 1).[9] For example, the marriage song functioned to abolish the ever-present fear of sexuality in a number of ways:

> Marriage itself of course serves in many cultures to channel sexuality into a form that promotes cultural norms rather than threatens them: children are produced and provided for, sex is regulated, and so on. Similarly, the authors of both Stuart and earlier epithalamia typically tame and civilize desire: they transform it from the anarchic lust that can threaten the couple and their culture to the love that produces harmony in this generation and generates heirs for the next. (Dubrow, *Eden* 84)

Furthermore, through financial metaphors associated with "due benevolence," such as those present in Donne's second wedding poem, and the play on "rites," meaning both "rituals" and legal "rights," sexuality was established "as a component of social obligations and regulations rather than as an enemy to them" (Dubrow, *Eden* 89). Moreover, the epithalamist warned the couple about sexual overindulgence through the metaphor of culinary overindulgence. By describing an excessive wedding feast which is too large and lingers on too long, the poet warns against sexual "gluttony" or immoderation (Dubrow, *Eden* 78), as Donne does in his Somerset-Howard epithalamion.

In the same vein, the Stuart epithalamion responded to the debate about whether weddings should be private or open and public. Because of its importance to the entire family

network as well as to the nation as a whole, it makes sense that marital union was a public rather than a private concern. However, while the roles assigned to the family, those of "little state" and "little church," served to emphasize the connection of the family to society as a whole, paradoxically they also increased the "boundary awareness" of the nuclear family (Stone, *The Family* 7). Stone claims that there was "a decline of loyalties to lineage, kin, patron and local community as they were increasingly replaced by more universalistic loyalties to the nation state and its head" (*The Family* 7). Allegiance to kin must have been weakened further by the new-found self-sufficiency of the nuclear family under the capitalist system. Furthermore, because of the replacement, in many families, of the priest with the father as religious instructor, the nuclear family became even more closed off from external influences (Stone, *The Family* 7). Lastly, because of the Protestant emphasis on love-marriages, the family became more intimate and emotionally fulfilling and began to be seen as a haven or an escape from a cruel society.

As a result of the increasing individualism of the marital union and of the family, the fear of clandestine marriages, which "reflected a certain personalizing of marriage vows" (Ozment 27), overwhelmed conservatives and powerful members of the Anglican Church.[10] According to Catholic doctrine, young people of marriageable age

(fourteen for boys and twelve for girls) could perform the marriage ceremony themselves by promising to love one another and to live together until death. Once consummated, this exchange of vows was considered to be a valid union both civilly and spiritually (Ozment 25).[11] On the other hand, Protestants condemned the recognition of secretly-made vows as valid unions: the "only fully satisfactory form of marriage was an ecclesiastically solemnized union, performed in the face of the church after the calling of the banns" (Wrightson 67).

The validity of a marriage entered into without parental consent was also the subject of much debate during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Since marriage was considered by Catholic divines to be a sacrament or "a spiritual rather than a temporal or civil contract, it became a matter between God and the couple" (Ozment 27). Therefore, although the consent of parents was desirable, it was not at all necessary (Schuking 82). A marriage was held valid both legally and spiritually even in the face of parental opposition (George 290). On the other hand, because marriage was a means of financial or political advantage for a family[12] and because it provided a stable basis for society as a whole, many Protestants felt that parental consent was not only desirable, but absolutely necessary for a proper marital union, even when the child was of age. In fact, many preachers believed that "it was the parents' obligation to choose suitable mates for their

children. Their children's duty was to accept the choice" (Hamilton 62).

Nevertheless, even those Protestants who valued parental consent were urging parents to respect the wishes of their children. Because of the emphasis placed upon mutual love, respect, and comfort; the difficulty of terminating a marriage under new Protestant law; and the Puritan abhorrence of adultery on the part of either spouse, it became extremely important for one to choose for himself a partner he could actually love. As a result, many handbooks, such as *The Booke of Matrimony* by Thomas Becon, consistently criticize the aristocratic "mercenary marriage" (as Donne does in the "Lincolnes Inne" poem) which "is pressed by greedy parents upon unwilling children" and argue instead for the "love marriage" (Mikesell 36-38).

Through the conventional epithalamic images of a unified community happily celebrating a wedding and of marriage as "a source and symbol of a united and properly functioning society" (Dubrow, *Eden* 59), the epithalamist asserted that marriage was definitely a public event sanctioned by parents rather than a private exchange of vows, thereby eliminating the fear of clandestine marriages. In his marriage song for the Princess Elizabeth, by setting the wedding within the public realm, Donne circumvents the tensions associated with secretly-made vows, and, by emphasizing the reciprocal and private love relationship of the marital partners, addresses and resolves the Puritan

fear of the "mercenary" or arranged marriage discussed above.

The Stuart epithalamion responded also to the question about the sacredness of marriage. Paradoxically, while the status of marriage improved greatly as a result of the Reformation, Protestants, unlike their Catholic counterparts, did not consider wedlock to be a sacrament. However, although marriage was established as a purely civil contract in Reformation England, there was "a reluctance to consider the occasion as wholly secular" (Dubrow, *Eden* 6). In fact, as "the Anglican Church tightened its grip on society in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, both the laity and the clergy came increasingly to regard the wedding in the church as the key ceremony" (Stone, *The Family* 32). Most of the Puritans, like the more conservative Anglicans, "while not condemning marriage by magistrates as unlawful, considered it 'lawful, more convenient and comfortable' that it should be solemnized by the church" (Powell 44). Even civil lawyers encouraged "betrothed couples to postpone cohabitation and coition until after the public church service--in the court's opinion, the surest way to end the strife of a contested secret marriage" (Ozment 36). Again, opinions on the degree to which marriage was either sacred or secular were far from uniform.

Because marriage was no longer a sacrament in Reformation England and because matrimonial ceremonies were no longer uniform as a result of the differing faiths, by

and large epithalamists of the seventeenth century devoted far less attention than early Renaissance poets to the rituals in the church (Dubrow, *Eden* 71). Instead, writers of marriage songs, unable to accept wedlock as purely secular, attempted "to place marriage in a divine scheme that includes Christianity but reaches beyond it to a universal religion" (Miller 410), as Donne does in his Elizabeth-Palatine and, to some extent, his Somerset-Howard wedding poems. Therefore, no member of society would be alienated: all members could share in the celebrations.

Because there were so many differing opinions on the constitution of a proper marriage, there is little wonder that the question of divorce and, more specifically, annulment was "one of the most vexing problems that the church ever brought upon itself" (Powell 7). Catholic Church annulments had been granted for a number of reasons, including fear caused by threats and impotency (Powell 10). While, in theory, the "high" Anglicans differed from the Catholic Church in no way, the Puritans differed radically from both the Catholic and "high" Anglican Churches. Collectively, the Puritans agreed to replace the Catholic annulment, which in their opinion was granted too easily, with divorce (Powell 63, 73); however, Puritan opinions on the proper grounds for divorce were far from consistent. Positions in the debate on divorce ranged from the conservatism of Henry Cornelius Agrippa, who disallowed divorce on any grounds, including barrenness and impotence

(excepting only adultery on the part of the wife), to the liberalism of John Milton, who advocated divorce on grounds of incompatibility (Fitz 10). Furthermore, there were many differing opinions on remarriage. While some preachers such as Perkins argued for remarriage in some cases, other preachers such as John Reynolds and Lancelot Andrewes claimed that remarriage is not legitimate under any circumstances, since the former marriage is life-long and cannot be dissolved (George 271). The scandal which surrounded the divorce of Lady Frances Howard from the Earl of Essex and her subsequent remarriage to the Earl of Somerset, which will be discussed in Chapter IV, attests to the turmoil associated with divorce and remarriage and, also, to the condemnation and reproof of pre- and extra-marital affairs by the increasingly Puritan gentry and merchants.

Because there were ambivalent attitudes toward marriage and sexuality, there were contradictory attitudes toward women as well. According to Thomistic Catholicism, woman is far inferior to man for many reasons:

> God makes woman because "it is not good that man should be alone," he needs a "helper"; and God instructs woman that her "husband shall rule" over her. Because woman was initially made from the side of man to be his *helper*, and afterward, in her postlapsarian state, ordered to be his subject, she was doubly under-privileged. The manner of her creation revealed her *ontological* inferiority, her punishment after the loss of paradise her *political* subordination in historical time. (Jordan 22)

Furthermore, St. Thomas Aquinas, who perpetuated "the

Aristotelian concept of woman as a misshapen or half-formed man," claimed that woman is physiologically inferior to man as well (George 259). As a result of her inferiority, as a child the woman is subject to her father and as an adult she is subject to her husband. Once married, the husband controls all aspects of his wife's existence and, although he may not terminate her life, he may use corporal punishment to correct her when she disobeys (George 263). No doubt, the fear of sexuality, more specifically female sexuality, did much to devalue women. As previously discussed, celibacy was the Catholic ideal and when Catholic religious figures attacked sex, woman, "who instances man's fleshliness," was likewise attacked (Jordan 25): woman and sex were often thought of as "twin evils" (Hamilton 73).[13]

While Catholicism reduced the status of women in many ways, Protestantism raised the status of women in many ways.[14] For example, the refashioning of sexuality by the Puritans, who claimed that marital sex was pure and indeed sacred, certainly helped to abolish the fear of and distaste for women. Furthermore, although "the subordination of wife to husband in household government is an absolutely universal postulate in literature," relative to its statement in Thomistic Catholicism, "the theme in English Protestantism appears to be definitely muted" (George 276-77). Instead, Protestant religious figures emphasized both companionship in a marriage and the spiritual equality of the sexes. Unlike their Catholic counterparts, who declared

that the companionable needs of man would be better served by association with another man, Protestants claimed that since Eve was created by God to be the companion of Adam, a man must have had and must still have a "natural" desire for the company of a woman rather than another man (Haller 246).

Ironically, although English Protestantism closed nunneries and forbade women the performance of routine ecclesiastical functions, the newly emphasized spiritual equality of the sexes actually enhanced the status of women in religious life (George 289). As discussed above, in Protestant England the family became the central spiritual unit and, as such, it "needed members who were at least theoretically capable of a high standard of morality. Consequently, doctrines emphasizing the evilness of women had to be muted" (Hamilton 64) and, instead, biblical texts illustrating the spiritual equality (such as Genesis I) were stressed. Generally, English Protestant divines agreed that it was the "responsibility and privilege of wives to share with their husbands in the supervision of domestic devotions" (George 289). As a result, the woman began to hold a very central place in the domestic community, and "it is just this enhanced respect accorded the mother that constitutes one of the most noteworthy advances of the age" (Schuking 139).

The Protestants also raised substantially the status of women through the abolition of the double standard which allowed husbands complete sexual freedom while oppressing

wives:

> Among the upper classes for most of the Early Modern period, the "double standard" of sexual behaviour prevailed. According to this convention, the husband enjoyed full monopoly rights over the sexual services of his wife, who was expected to be a virgin on her wedding night....On the other hand, the man was expected to have gained some sexual experience before marriage, and any infidelities after marriage were treated as venial sins which the sensible wife was advised to overlook. (Stone, *The Family* 501)

By emphasizing the Pauline texts which address the concept of "due benevolence," Protestant divines suggested that both a husband and a wife "have the right to demand sexual relations, and the partner may not refuse" (Dubrow, *Eden* 24). Furthermore, while Catholicism condemned only the pre-marital and extra-marital affairs of wives, Protestantism considered pre-marital unchastity and adultery on the part of husbands as well as wives to be grievous sins and disruptions of societal order. Thus, if a husband committed adultery, his wife had an equal right to demand a divorce and to remarry. Dubrow believes that this sexual equality between the spouses was expanded to include other realms as well:

> The implications of the marriage debt extend beyond the bedroom, the recurrence of the word "power" in the Pauline text, as well as in glosses on the marriage tracts, gestures towards a metaphoric equation connecting sexual rights and other types of rights, as well as other types of power. (*Eden* 25)

Therefore, as sexuality had been at one time a source of oppression, it later became a source of freedom for women.

The epithalamist attempted to control the still prevalent fear of female sexuality and to address the

changing status of women in several ways. Through the use of certain epithalamic conventions introduced in antiquity, such as the urging of the bride to come forward, the reluctance of the bride to relinquish her maidenhood, and the comparisons of love-making to a battle and of the bride to a sacrificial victim, all of which may be found in Donne's epithalamia, the poet attests to the virginity of the bride before marriage and predicts her sexual fidelity after marriage (Dubrow, *Eden* 64). In addition, the bride's sexuality is regulated completely by men:

> The awakening of the bride, which no doubt alludes to her sexual awakening, is disassociated from her own volition: it occurs in response to an injunction. Moreover, a male poet commands the sexuality of the bride, just as her husband may later do. Thus the writer delimits the fears potentially excited by the concept of due benevolence: if desire involves debt, a male clerk writes and reads the ledger and does so to his own ends. (Dubrow, *Eden* 53)

However, because of the increased status of women, it made sense for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century epithalamists to compliment the bride as well. For instance, the "comparisons between the rising bride and rising sun..., the very fact that the poem and the wedding day begin when she gets up is a tribute to her power" (Dubrow, *Eden* 55). Similarly, by comparing the bride to Queen Elizabeth, epithalamists invested "the bride with dignity and potency" (Dubrow, *Eden* 64). Thus, the epithalamist was able to keep the bride inferior and subordinate to her husband without degrading her, her sexuality, or the institution of marriage.

In general, through resolution, reinterpretation, and simple repression or denial, seventeenth-century writers of marriage songs crafted "a mythic vision of wedlock" and, like other myths, theirs was "less a rendition of actual events surrounding weddings than a story that the culture wishes and needs to tell about itself" (Dubrow, *Eden* 41). For this reason, the critic who expects to find happiness and unity and subsequently overlooks the contradictions and ambivalences present in the epithalamia tends to view wedding poetry as "not authentic" or "insincere." However, sometimes the poet was unsuccessful in resolving the tensions associated with wedlock, as Donne is in his "Epithalamion made at Lincolnes Inn," and sometimes he did not wish to resolve them at all but, rather, to satirize certain wedding conventions or other aspects of society, as Donne does in his Somerset-Howard wedding song. Therefore, to dismiss seventeenth-century epithalamia as "not credible" is a mistake, for, as I hope to show in my discussion of Donne's marriage songs, they illustrate much more about their context than critics have acknowledged.

CHAPTER II
THE "EPITHALAMION MADE AT LINCOLNES INNE"

John Donne's "Epithalamion made at Lincolnes Inne" is something of an enigma in that critics do not know for certain when and for whom it was written. While Robert Case and James McPeek assign the poem to the time when Donne was a reader at Lincoln's Inn (1616-22), most critics agree that it was composed while Donne was a student there, and, more specifically, after the publication of Spenser's *Epithalamion* in 1595, but before Donne left Lincoln's Inn to participate in the Cadiz expedition (1596). In about half of the manuscripts in which the poem appears, it is entitled "Epithalamion on a Citizen" (Novarr 254). The use of the generic "Citizen" suggests that Donne's contemporaries themselves did not know for whom the poem was intended or whether it was intended for anyone at all. Although the line "Yee of those fellowships whereof hee's one" (29) may suggest that Donne wrote the epithalamion with a specific groom in mind (Ousby, "Alternative" 141), critics such as James Sheehan, M. Byron Raizis, Thomas McLernon Greene, and Arthur Marotti assume that the poem is merely a poetic experiment, an attempt at composing in a recently popular and, no doubt, challenging genre, as W. Milgate suggests:

> This epithalamion, however, like practically all Donne's other poetry, was written for his own delight or satisfaction, or for the pleasure of his friends. Its primary motive seems to have been the fun of trying his hand at an epithalamion. (xxi)

Throughout this marriage song, Donne exemplifies many

of the conventions initiated in antiquity, such as the dichotomy between death and life, and introduces many of the image patterns, motifs, and techniques, such as sacrificial imagery, the platonic exchange of identities, and satirical overtones, elaborated upon later in his Elizabeth-Palatine and Somerset-Howard epithalamia. Furthermore, many of the problems faced by writers of marriage songs, such as the degree to which marriage is sacred or secular, the relative worth of matrimony and celibacy, the proper place of women, and the proper motives for marrying (conflicts intensified by Donne's own struggle between the Catholic and Protestant faiths), become apparent in this epithalamion: the "Lincolnes Inne" marriage song "is one of the clearest instances of the problems and tensions associated with the Stuart epithalamium" (Dubrow, *Eden* 164). However, although all of these tensions unfold within the course of the poem, because of Donne's inexperience with the epithalamic genre, his literary environment at the time of the poem's creation, and his uncertainty about the extent to which the composition of a wedding poem depends upon literary conventions or the poet's own innovations, many of them remain unresolved, as is reflected in the discordant images, unrefined language, and harsh unsettling tone.

Whether they are indicative of an improper union or of the triumph of order and harmony over the forces which threaten both the marriage and the nation, references to

death in epithalamia are numerous and even conventional. Many critics interested in genre, such as Celeste Schenk, Alistair Fowler (*Kinds of Literature*) and Heather Dubrow (*Genre*), agree that epithalamion and elegy are both opposites and twins: "the elegy and the epithalamion are companion genres, invested in similar ways of managing loss and guaranteeing continuity" (Schenk 12). That is, through references to death, both genres attempt to emphasize life and birth or to "circumvent the issue of mortality by incorporating structures of transcendence and rebirth in their works" (Schenk 1). We know from Donne's other works that he "was perfectly capable of conceiving of epithalamion and elegy as dynamic and related opposites" (Schenk 12). In one of his sermons, for example, Donne writes,

> Heaven is Glory, and heaven is Joy; we cannot tell which most; we cannot separate them; and this comfort is joy in the Holy Ghost....This Consolation from the Holy Ghost makes my mid-night noone, mine Executioner a Physitian, a stake and pile of Fagots, a Bone-fire of triumph; this consolation makes a Satyr, and Slander, and Libell against me, a Panegyrique, and an Elogy in my praise....It makes my death-bed, a mariage-bed, And my Passing-Bell, an Epithalamion. (6:316)

The conventional dichotomy between death and rebirth must have been intensely important to epithalamists of the seventeenth century, an age which, for various reasons, was preoccupied with death and dying (Nicholson 107). In fact, Stone asserts that "the most striking feature which distinguished the Early Modern family from that of today does not concern either marriage or birth; it was the constant presence of death. Death was at the centre of

life, as the cemetery was at the centre of the village" (*The Family* 66). Moreover, Ousby suggests that Donne's concentration on death in this marriage song seems to reflect his own idiosyncratic interests and fears expressed in a countless number of his other poems, such as "Holy Sonnet X," "Elegie: Death," and "An Anatomie of the World." Donne emphasizes death "because he is obsessed with it, because he sees the skull beneath the skin of even a bride and groom" ("Alternative" 135). Thus, the references to death in this poem, each of which incorporates images of transcendence and rebirth, illustrate not only the fears and preoccupations of the multitude, but those of Donne as well.

Donne begins his poem with a comparison between a bed and a grave which points not only toward the procreation of children, but toward the rebirth of the bride as matron, a state considered to be superior to that of maiden:

> The Sun-beames in the East are spred,
> Leave, leave, faire Bride, your solitary bed,
> No more shall you returne to it alone,
> It nourseth sadnesse, and your bodies print,
> Like to a grave, the yielding downe doth dint. (1-5)

The bed is a grave only in that it is "solitary" (3) or "single": as long as the bride remains a virgin, her bed will remain barren. However, the bride's bed has the potential to become fertile or life-giving. When she and her husband "meet there anon" (6), and the bride puts forth "that warme balme-breathing thigh" (7) to "meet another" (9), the death-bed will be transformed into the marriage-bed, the seat of procreation and birth. Similarly, since

the bride's loss of virginity was often thought of in the Renaissance as a kind of death, it is understandable that the bride's bed in Donne's poem is compared to the grave; however, since the bride will be reborn as a matron, the bed is, again, life-giving. This idea is supported by both the reference to "sheets" (8), which might pre-figure "the shroud in which her dying virginity smothers, or the sheets of conjugal bedding between which her nascent sexuality smoulders and her natural fecundity rests in potential" (Schenk 79), and by another reference to the bride's bed later in the poem: "This bed is onely to virginitie/ A grave, but, to a better state, a cradle" (79-80). Therefore, through references to the grave and images of death, Donne urges the bride to realize her potential as wife and commemorates procreation and life: the poem becomes "a praise of the marital state for women instead of the celibate one" (Sheehan 46).

Similarly, Donne's comparison of the bride to a sacrificial victim alludes to sexual transformation and generation:

> Even like a faithfull man content,
> That this life for a better should be spent,
> So, shee a mothers rich stile doth preferre,
> And at the Bridegroomes wish'd approach doth lye,
> Like an appointed lambe, when tenderly
> The priest comes on his knees t'embowell her. (85-90)

Even though the image of the embowelling of the bride is very harsh and unsettling, sacrificial imagery, more specifically, the comparison of the bride to a sacrificial

victim, was quite common in classical epithalamia and was deemed appropriate for use in the Renaissance by Scaliger (Tufte 218). Furthermore, this embowelling may be representative of the transformation of maiden to matron already discussed: "Donne makes of the virgin's impending wifehood a mystic rite of passage which entails a necessary but 'pleasing sacrifice' on 'loves altar' (74-75) (Schenk 78). Of course, this reading is supported by lines 85-86 in which the bride is likened to a man who prefers to surrender his present existence in exchange for a better one. In addition, there is a double pun on "t'embowell" meaning "to hide in the inward parts" (*O.E.D.* 5:168), thereby suggesting sexual intercourse, and alluding to the contemporary use of "bowell" as a synonym for "offspring," thereby implying that the bridegroom will engender an heir (*O.E.D.* 2:455). These readings are quite probable since both sexuality and procreation are stressed throughout the poem.

Finally, Donne illustrates the connection between death and life or rebirth in the conventional prayer for a long life:

> Thy two-leav'd gates faire Temple unfold,
> And these two in thy sacred bosome hold,
> Till, mystically joyn'd, but one they bee;
> Then may thy leane and hunger-starved wombe
> Long time expect their bodies and their tombe,
> Long after their owne parents fatten thee. (37-42)

Like the reference to the "tombe" (215) in his Somerset-Howard wedding poem, references to death in this passage "constitute a witty way of satisfying the epithalamic

convention of wishing the bride and groom a long life" since Donne expresses the hope that the "tombe" (41) will remain a "hunger-starved wombe" (40) for a "Long time" (41), long after the bride's and groom's own parents depart (Gayle Edward Wilson 73). Moreover, by describing the church with expressions such as "two-leav'd gates" (37), "sacred bosome" (38), and "leane and hunger-starved wombe" (40), which suggest female reproductive anatomy, Donne emphasizes rebirth and immortality and addresses one of the main tensions associated with marriage: the degree to which wedlock is sacred (spiritual) or secular (romantic and sexual).

Throughout his canon, Donne treats sacred and profane love as "interrelated and interdependent," "complementary and mutually inclusive" (Kremen 93). In "The Flea," for instance, the couple's "marriage bed" and "marriage temple" (13) are one. Likewise, in "To His Mistris Going to Bed" Donne uses religious language to seduce his mistress, and in "The Canonization" he speaks of natural or physical experience in supernatural or religious language. Death and resurrection are spoken of in terms of sexual "dying" and "rising." Similarly, in many of Donne's divine poems, he speaks of man's relationship to God in sexual terms. In "Holy Sonet XIV," for instance, Donne claims that unless God imprisons (12) or enthralls (13) him, he will never be free and unless God ravishes (14) him, he will never be chaste. As he does in many of his other lyrics, Donne, throughout

this epithalamion, intertwines the sacred and the secular or collapses the distinction between body and soul, thereby implying that marriage is both spiritual and physical.

With its combination of the sensual and the fescennine, associated with the pagan classical epithalamion, and the ascetic, associated with the Catholic medieval epithalamion, this wedding poem becomes a paradoxical portrayal of earthly and heavenly aspects of marriage. For example, in the description of the embowelling of the bride, by referring to the bride as an "appointed lambe" (89) and to the bridegroom as a "priest" (90), Donne seems to be stressing "the sacredness and significance of the sexual act" (Ousby, "Alternative" 134). Furthermore, as Carey points out, the way in which the groom approaches the bride, "on his knees" (90), may allude to a sexual position (143). Read in this manner, this line also conflates "that sexual position with the priest's reverential stance at the bloody ritual he is performing" (Dubrow, *Eden* 163). Tufte asserts that the sacrificial embowelling conflates the sacred and the profane in another way as well, since the surrender of the bride's virginity to her husband is suggestive of the "act of surrender of the Virgin to God" (222). Similarly, by comparing the bride's metamorphosis from maiden to matron to a Christian man's relinquishing of the earthly for the heavenly (85-87), Donne suggests the integration of human marriage (the sexual union of husband and wife) with both spiritual marriage (the union of Christ and the church) and

mystical marriage (the union of God and the individual soul).[1] The comparison of the bride to a man also alludes to the motif of the reversal of the sexes or the platonic exchange of identities, which is illustrated in Donne's other two marriage songs as well as in a number of his songs and sonnets, such as "The Extasie" (29-36, 42, 45), "A Valediction: forbidding mourning" (17-21), "The Relique" (25), and "Lovers Infiniteness" (33), and points toward both physical and spiritual union, for, as Cirillo writes,

> in mutual love, the beloved reciprocates the love of the lover and dies in him just as he dies in her, in such a way that they exchange identities, giving and receiving each other in love. The result of this kind of love-death is a new life in which the two become one, body and soul, as a new entity containing both. (83)

As well, Grierson asserts that the refrain connects the heavenly and earthly aspects of marriage, for, while the word "perfection" may be applied to the conception of a child in an earthly marriage, it may refer also to the Catholic notion of a "higher" perfection associated with the virgin when wedded to Christ in a mystical marriage (Grierson II:99-100).

A poem which communicates both the sacred and the secular aspects of marriage fits perfectly the young Donne at Lincoln's Inn, for, in 1595, Donne was still debating his religion and, no doubt, the differing views of marriage held by the competing Christian faiths (Sheehan 47). Throughout his poetry and prose, Donne repeatedly contradicts himself on the relative worth of marriage, the Protestant ideal, and

celibacy, the Catholic ideal. In one of his sermons, for instance, Donne writes,

> First then, for the having children, and the testimony of Gods love in that blessing, this diminishes nothing the honour due to the first chastity, the chastity of virginity. There is a chastity in Marriage: But the chastity of virginity, is the proper, and principal chastity. (III:68)

Similarly, in "A Funerall Elegie," Donne writes:

> So the world studied whose this peece should be,
> Till shee can be no bodies else, nor shee:
> But like a Lampe of Balsamum, desir'd
> Rather t'adorne, then last, she soone expir'd,
> Cloath'd in her virgin white integritie,
> For marriage, though it doe not staine, doth dye.
> To scape th'infirmities which wait upon
> Woman, she went away, before sh'was one. (71-78)

Although Renaissance epithalamic convention as well as contemporary Protestant ideologies dictated that Donne praise earthly marriage, he could not dismiss the Catholic medieval celebration of mystical marriage. While this tension was felt by many Protestants, it must have been intensified in the case of Donne who was raised a Catholic but who must have known that only a Protestant could advance in his society.

Sheehan suggests that "Donne's Catholicism certainly left him with a medieval attitude toward woman as both a mysterious desirable source of fertility and, at the same time, a lesser Mary, an object of ascetic devotion and perfection" (47). Like his divine poem "The Litanie" (V) and many of his songs and sonnets, such as "The Primrose...," this marriage song seems to express both of the attitudes described by Sheehan. However, in this poem,

Donne seems to conclude, as he does in his sermon for the marriage of Margaret Washington,[2] that the proper place of woman is as wife and mother. Furthermore, Donne's "Lincolnes Inne" epithalamion illustrates the misogynistic tendencies and fears of female sexuality associated with Catholicism. For example, Dubrow asserts that by suggesting that the bride is "willingly appropriated and destroyed in a sacramental ritual" performed by an aggressive and dominant male attacker, Donne creates "a fantasy that attempts to compensate for the fears of female equality" (*Eden* 162).

While Donne seems to express his approval of marrying for reasons of procreation, he also seems to express his disapproval of marrying for financial reasons. Throughout stanzas II and III, Donne communicates his "extraromantic awareness of the economic world in which amorous relationships were inevitably involved" (Marotti, *Coterie* 144) and satirizes those who marry for money rather than for love, a prevalent practice among the Inns-of-Court population and especially among younger brothers who had little or no hope of inheriting money or property (Marotti, *Coterie* 52). Donne makes it clear to the reader that while the bride is "As gay as Flora" (22) and "faire,...glad, and in nothing lame" (23), she is also "as rich as Inde" (22). Likewise, while the bridesmaids, who are called "Our Golden Mines, and furnish'd Treasurie" (14), "are Angels" (15), they will also "bring with [them]/ Thousands of Angels, on [their] mariage daies" (15-16). Donne also makes it quite clear that the

groom and the groomsmen wish to marry these ladies, at least in part, for financial reasons:

> And you frolique Patricians,
> Sonns of these Senators wealths deep oceans,
> Ye painted courtiers, barrels of others wits,
> Yee country men, who but your beasts love none,
> Yee of those fellowships whereof hee's one. (25-29)

Grierson glosses the "frolique Patricians" as the would-be suitors to the daughters of the moneyed merchants. They are not the sons of the senators but, rather, their sons-in-law, potential or actual:

> They are or are willing to be, the sons, by marriage not by blood, of "these Senators," or rather of their money-bags. In a word, they marry their daughters for money, as the hero of the *Epithalamion* is doing. (II:98)

Grierson also suggests that there is a pun on "Sonns" (26) meaning "sunnes" as well. Therefore, like suns, these young men "drink up the deep oceans of these Senators' wealth" (II:98). Apparently, as Sheehan points out, the Patrician groomsmen are of three types: the courtiers, the country squires, and the men of the Inns of whom the groom is one (45). Therefore, Donne satirizes all three groups, the groom, and, assuming the speaker also belongs to one of these groups, himself as well.

As Donne criticizes the Inns-of-Court gentleman and the various routes of advancement he follows (the lawyer in "Satyre II," for example) in his satires, so he criticizes the groomsmen in this epithalamion who use marriage, which, along with royal favour, was the main means of rising into the peerage (Stone, *Crisis* 90), to enhance their secular

careers. However, Donne satirizes the groomsmen for reasons other than their less than romantic motives to marry the wealthy senators' daughters. For instance, the line, "Ye painted courtiers, barrels of others wits" (27), describes the foppery as well as the writing abilities of the courtly portion of the groomsmen. Similarly, the line, "Yee country men, who but your beasts love none" (28), illustrates the trivial preoccupations of the country portion of the groomsmen and, perhaps, alludes to their sexual proclivities.

Although references to riches and money illustrate, for the most part, Donne's awareness of the influence of economics on a relationship and his attitude toward marriages made for financial reasons, they also illustrate something of Donne's attitude towards women as well as his feelings of inadequacy in the social, political, and economic realms. Marotti suggests that

> the rich middle-class woman of late Elizabethan London was regarded by Donne and his fellows as a threat, frighteningly emancipated and self-assertive. Anti-feminist love poems depicting the sexual conquest of such women and a satiric attitude toward the class they belonged were, thus, the products of socioeconomic resentment and of larger class rivalries. (52)

As mentioned previously, the embowelling of the bride (87-90) depicts the sexual conquest by the Inns-of-Court groom. However, because the bride belongs to the rich middle-class, the conquest becomes much more than sexual; it is political, social, and economic as well. Therefore, the poem which depicts the libertine lover's exploitation of and control

over a submissive wealthy woman also becomes illustrative of Donne's "desire to control not simply women, but all those unmanageable circumstances of life in the larger society in which young gentlemen felt vulnerable and inadequate" (Marotti 52-53). These desires can be seen in many of Donne's other poems. In "Loves Progresse," for instance, Donne "lays bare the connections between amorous and economic desires and exploits in terms that his Inns audience could particularly appreciate" (Marotti 50): sexuality is defined in terms of commercial realities (1-3) and women are compared to economic commodities such as gold (9-18).

Perhaps it is the satirical jibes directed at both the Inns men and the wealthy middle-class which lead critics, such as David Novarr, who misreads the poem as a parody of Spenser's *Epithalamion* written for mock-nuptials, to conclude that Donne's "Epithalamion made at Lincolnes Inne" is less than entirely serious. No doubt, the critic who expects to find harmony, order, and the ideal will mistake a poem such as this, which illustrates a "sophisticated awareness of the mercantile basis of city marriages and of the physical realities underlying the idealizing wedding ceremonies" (Lewalski, "*Persona*e" 196), for something it is not. Even a critic such as W. Milgate, who recognizes that "Donne could not fail to note the discrepancy between the perfect paradigm of marriage and what weddings were really like in the City," suggests that this epithalamion is "not a success

as a whole" as "it is neither consistent satire nor committed celebration, and its wit and imaginative force are uneasily divided between these purposes" (xxii). I concur with Milgate that Donne's poem is not completely successful, but not for the same reasons. I believe that it is through this division of purpose Milgate identifies that Donne is able to satirize certain aspects of his society without debasing the institution of marriage or the mythic vision of the epithalamion.

Many of the problems and tensions associated with the Stuart epithalamion remain unresolved in this marriage song, as is reflected in the harshness and dissonance of the language, images, and tone. Instead of transcending death and pointing toward rebirth, many of Donne's images actually create an atmosphere of impending doom. For instance, in the conventional prayer for long life (40-42), Donne "does more than suggest that the church will receive the bodies of the lovers. He is hopeful that the lovers' parents will die before they do, and his use of 'fatten' expresses an untoward relish" (Novarr 251). In the same vein, while trying to conflate the sacred and the secular in the description of the church (37-40), Donne comes uneasily close to irreverence and sacrilege. David Novarr explains "the strangeness of tone and oddness of details" by suggesting that this poem was written to amuse, delight, and even "convulse" (258) the gentlemen celebrating mid-summer revels at Lincoln's Inn. However, if Donne's references to

death and the grave seem "blunter" and "less lovingly developed" (Novarr 251) in this poem than in his Elizabeth-Palatine and Somerset-Howard wedding poems, and if his "wit is too close to insult" and lacks "the cavalier gentility of Donne's other epithalamia" (Novarr 254), it is probably because Donne was simply inexperienced with the epithalamic genre: Donne was "more liable to occasional blunders in 1595 than in 1613" (Dubrow, *Eden* 157).[3]

Throughout the "Epithalamion made at Lincolnes Inne," Donne's use of convention is much less skillful than it is in his other wedding poems. For instance, Donne laments the delay in the proceedings with the rather awkward lines, "But that the Sun still in our halfe Spheare sweates;/ Hee flies in winter, but he now stands still" (54-55), and describes the bride's approach in a manner which leads to misinterpretation: "Loe, in yon path which store of straw'd flowers graceth,/ The sober virgin paceth;/ Except my sight faile, 'tis no other thing" (32-34). Tufte believes that these lines constitute a "parody of the traditional bride whose beauty blinds the onlookers" (222), as Lady Frances does in Donne's third wedding poem. Paul Miller and Celeste Schenk suggest that rather than parodying this convention, these lines raise questions concerning the purity of the bride or call the bride's virginity into doubt. This reading seems more plausible than that of Tufte when one considers the degenerating morality of the women[4] of the court as well as the other satirical overtones present in the poem; however,

it is more likely that these lines represent the poetry of a less refined writer.

In addition, Ousby suggests that many of Donne's comparisons are examples of "unsuccessful experiments in metaphysical wordplay," and they fail "in a way that is characteristic of metaphysical imagery: the connotations jar too much, the tingling of glass is out of control" ("Alternative" 133-34). For example, in the conventional description of the procession, Donne compares the groomsmen to "strange Hermaphrodits" (30). While the groomsmen are hermaphroditic in that they combine the two activities of "study" (30), "which embraced not only law, but also lectures and tutoring in disciplines not taught at the university or reading in a wide variety of areas" (Marotti 30), and "play" (30), which included theatre-going, witty versifying, and, at times, "obsessive drinking, gaming, and womanizing" (Marotti 30), they, much like the comparison itself, are "strange" (30) because the term "hermaphrodite" is normally used to describe a being with the characteristics of both sexes. Finally, in the description of the feast, Donne compares the musicians and dancers to "toyl'd beasts" (67), which gives the reader the impression that the community is not happily celebrating this wedding, as epithalamic convention dictates it should be.

Although Donne's inexperience is probably the primary reason for the "occasional blunders" one finds in this poem,

no doubt, his audience, and his literary environment at the time of the poem's creation influenced him as well. Because Donne was writing for a group of his peers, who had capabilities similar to his own, rather than for a patron, Donne may have permitted himself a certain amount of carelessness: he felt "free to observe without premeditation, without reference to what the event ought to be and is supposed to be" (Greene, "The Epithalamion" 210). Surely, if this poem were being written for a patron, Donne would have "softened" the tone and images and refined the language. Moreover, the dissonant effects may be indicative of the division felt by many of the literary men of the Inns of Court. Many Inns writers were torn between the plain-speaking directness, sexual realism, critical argumentativeness, and aggressive masculine self-assertion of the libertine lover, then fashionable at the Inns, and the polite compliment, amorous idealization, sentimental mystification, and politely self-effacing subservience characteristic of courtly Petrarchism (Marotti 45).[5] Marotti suggests than Donne "had not successfully integrated these two rhetorical modes" in his early verse epistles and, perhaps, he had not done so in this epithalamion either. Donne and his peers were engaged also in producing *modern* versions of *classical* genres, another tension which may result in the discordant effects of this poem.

Finally, it seems that some of the strangeness of the poem may be attributed to Donne's uncertainty about the

degree to which his epithalamion should reflect the work of his literary predecessors, Spenser in particular, and his own innovations. Greene suggests that it is dangerous to trace conventions of one work back to another specific work since, "as the body of Renaissance epithalamia increased, the influence of any single poem decreased" ("Spenser" 218). However, despite this fact, most critics agree that Donne's "Lincolnes Inne" epithalamion was influenced heavily by Spenser's *Epithalamion*, for, besides the fact that this wedding poem, like Spenser's, celebrates a bourgeois rather than an aristocratic wedding, many lines from Donne's poem echo directly those of Spenser's poem. For instance, Donne's "Daughters of London" (13) parallels Spenser's "ye merchants daughters" (167); Donne's "two-leav'd gates" of the "faire Temple" (37) parallels Spenser's "temple gates" (204); Donne's "amorous evening starre" (61) parallels Spenser's "bright evening star" (286); Donne's "store of straw'd flowers" (32) parallels Spenser's "fragrant flowers" "strewed" (50); Donne's "Sun-beames in the East are spred" (1) parallels Spenser's "golden beame upon the hils doth spred" (20); and, finally, Donne's "dancing jollities" (52) parallels Spenser's "With joyance bring her and with jollity" (245).[6] However, although many similarities exist between Donne's poem and Spenser's, as most readers of these two poets know, their styles are very different. While Spenser's style is more characteristic of courtly Petrarchism, Donne's style, for the most part, is

characteristic of the Inns-of-Court realism commented on above. No doubt, the emergence of Donne's own voice in the course of a generally respectful imitation of his predecessor contributes to some of this marriage song's dissonance as well:

> [P]ossibly some of the discordant images reflect the problems that can arise when one poet imitates another poet who is very different from himself; that is, Donne may be merging certain of the mannerisms he considered most characteristic of his own work with those of Spenser and discovering the combination of these tones produces only discord. Most of the oddities of the poem seem to be the product of the tension between Donne's interest in Spenser and his need to reject him. (Ousby, "Alternative" 141)

Although Donne addresses many of the problems faced by writers of marriage songs discussed in Chapter I, such as the degree to which marriage is sacred or secular, the relative worth of celibacy and matrimony, the proper place of woman, the proper motives for marriage, as well as the extent to which the epithalamion should depend on literary conventions or the poet's own innovations, many of the tensions remain unresolved, as is reflected in the discordant images, unrefined language, and harsh unsettling tone. Some critics, such as David Novarr and Celeste Schenk, explain the oddities of this poem by suggesting that Donne is parodying the epithalamic genre in general and Spenser in particular. However, while I cannot argue with the critics who see the poem as only a partial success, I agree with Sheehan that "whatever forced and tasteless conceits mar the poem, are inadvertent not deliberate and

are by no means so numerous as to justify a parodic reading of the poem" (40). Instead, it is more likely that many of the puzzling elements of this marriage song are the results of Donne's religious struggle, his inexperience with the genre, and his literary environment. Even though Donne may not have been completely successful in resolving many of the problems associated with wedlock in his first attempt at the genre, he resolves the tensions discussed above and others in his second attempt, the marriage song for the Princess Elizabeth and the Elector Palatine.

CHAPTER III
"AN EPITHALAMION, OR MARIAGE SONG ON THE LADY ELIZABETH, AND COUNT PALATINE BEING MARRIED ON ST. VALENTINES DAY"

> If Donne's "Epithalamion made at Lincolnes Inne" is one of the clearest instances of the problems and tensions associated with the Stuart epithalamium, "An Epithalamion, or Mariage Song on the Lady Elizabeth, and Count Palatine" is one of the best examples of their resolution. (Dubrow, *Eden* 164)

In his epithalamion for the Princess Elizabeth (1613), Donne uses generic conventions to resolve many of the tensions associated with seventeenth-century wedlock, such as the extent to which marriage was public or private, sacred or secular, the value of sexuality, the manner in which a spouse was chosen, the status of women, and, after transcending his earlier medieval attitudes displayed in the "Lincolnes Inne" poem, the status and function of marriage itself. Furthermore, in this marriage song, unlike his first, Donne successfully balances the use of convention with personal innovation. Because Donne does in this marriage song what the epithalamic genre in the seventeenth century was expected to do: reconcile all of the tensions associated with wedlock, perpetuate the doctrines of order and degree, and fulfill the requirements of the patronage system without descending into sycophancy, critics such as Greene and Sheehan tend to dismiss it as "not authentic" or "not credible." However, although Donne's poem seems to be the "perfect" epithalamion in its presentation of the ideal, after examining the biographical details of Donne's own life, the philosophy of love developed in some of his early

secular lyrics, and the particular circumstances surrounding the marriage of Elizabeth and Frederick, we must conclude that the dismissal of this poem as "insincere" or "inflated" is unjustified.

As Greene points out, because the ideal version of the epithalamion is "a ritualistic public statement, unconcerned with the actual intimate experience undergone by individuals" ("The Epithalamion" 210-1), Stuart epithalamia, like many of their predecessors, typically emphasize the communal and public aspects of the wedding being celebrated. Furthermore, in Donne's day, "marriage was defined chiefly in Christian and social terms. Among its accepted purposes were to ally or strengthen families, regulate sexuality, produce children, and bring them into society" (Low 485). Wedlock, especially that of royalty, was defined as a public rather than a private contract (McGowan 192). Consequently, since Elizabeth's marriage was viewed largely as a strengthening of Protestantism, epithalamists celebrating this wedding "typically draw attention to [its] political and dynastic implications" (Dubrow, *Eden* 172).[1] As previously explained, James wanted universal peace between England and both the Protestant and the Catholic powers, and he intended to achieve this goal through the marriages of his children. Although he counseled Prince Henry in *Basilikon Doron* not to marry a woman of a different faith (see *Political Works* 35), "if Henry had not died on 6 November 1612, he would have married the daughter of Charles Emmanuel, Duke of

Savoy," to ensure peace with the Catholic countries (Strong 60). On the other hand, in order to increase James's influence with the German Calvinist Princes, Elizabeth was to marry Frederick V of the Palatinate (David Harris Wilson 280).

Although his contemporaries concentrate on the public, social, and political ramifications of the match, Donne, throughout this poem, emphasizes the private, sexual, and secular aspects of marriage as opposed to the couple's public and social duties and, in so doing, implies that the private and sexual union of the marital partners is most important. Donne de-emphasizes the public by merely ignoring the courtly context of the event: nowhere does Donne mention the king and only once does he mention the rank of the bride with the reference to "a Great Princess" (38). Instead, Donne describes the marriage in terms of the natural unions of birds, thereby placing the wedding within a conventional pastoral setting. Similarly, Donne uses the conventional lament in the delay of the proceedings, introduced by Catullus and employed by Statius and Claudian in their epic epithalamia, to stress the importance of the personal rather than the communal. It is not only the sun that "staies,/ Longer to day, then other daies" (57-58), but the social or public festivities, as well as the couple's own duties to the wedding guests, that interfere with what Donne considers to be the most important aspect of the union, the private consummation:

> And why doe you two walke,
> So slowly pac'd in this procession?
> Is all your care but to be look'd upon,
> And be to others spectacle, and talke?
> The feast, with gluttonous delaies,
> Is eaten, and too long their meat they praise,
> The masquers come too late, and'I thinke, will stay,
> Like Fairies, till the Cock crow them away. (61-68)

Likewise, the conventional undressing of the bride by the maidens is a source of detainment and irritation:

> They did, and night is come; and yet wee see
> Formalities retarding thee.
> What meane these Ladies, which (as though
> They were to take a clock in peeces,) goe
> So nicely about the Bride. (71-75)

The bride "Should vanish from her cloathes" (77) quickly and for no eyes other than those of her husband. The procession (61-64), the feast and celebration of the masquers (65-68), and the ministrations of the maidens or matrons (71-75), Donne implies, "are not central to an occasion that should center on the relationship, especially the sexual union of the couple themselves" (Dubrow, *Eden* 173). Thus, as he does in so many of his early love lyrics, Donne "constructs the outside world as a source of intrusion and entrapment rather than of solace and pleasure" in this poem as well (Dubrow, *Eden* 173).

While the conventional description of the feast and the celebrations suggests the delay of the couple's sexual union, it also serves to satirize the ostentation and gratuitous spending of the Jacobean court. In the comment on the masquers, for example, the reader "may detect an undertone of criticism of the lengthy and lavish festivities

occasioned by this wedding" (Dubrow, *Eden* 173). These festivities,[2] which David Harris Wilson calls "elaborate, tedious, poorly managed, grossly extravagant," "lavish, vulgar," wasteful and lacking good order (286), stretched over a fortnight and included mock battles, fireworks, masques, etc. Furthermore, a new Banqueting Hall was built (McGowan 185) and James "had been obliged to give a dowry of 40,000 pounds paid in cash" (Bingham 117). Of course, all of Donne's contemporaries knew that the marriage of the king's daughter would only add to his steadily mounting debts. For instance, in one of his letters, John Chamberlain writes that "this extreme cost and riches make us all poor" (Birch 226).

Like the communal festivities, the church ceremony itself, which was normally capitalized upon by Renaissance poets, in this poem seems nothing but an unnecessary nuisance. This ceremony, which receives two detailed and central stanzas in Spenser, receives a brief and vague one and one-half lines in Donne:

> Goe then to where the Bishop staies,
> To make you one, his way, which divers waies
> Must be effected; and when all is past,
> And that you'are one, by hearts and hands made fast,
> You two have one way left, your selves to'entwine,
> Besides this Bishops knot, or Bishop Valentine. (51-56 emphasis mine)

Furthermore, while proximity is stressed throughout the poem in lines such as "Come forth, come forth" (43 emphasis mine), "And finding here such store, is loth to set" (59 emphasis mine), and "Here lyes a shee Sunne, and a hee

Moone here" (85 emphasis mine), the word "Goe" (51) in this passage "represents a significant deviation, rendering the church ceremony more distant from the speaker's vision and from that of the reader" (Dubrow, *Eden* 171). Moreover, the word "Must" (53) conveys the sense that the ceremony is a necessary obligation rather than a pleasure, and the word "fast" (54), which could mean both "firmly fixed" and "rapid" (*O.E.D.* 5:746-7), gives the reader a sense of urgency to move from the marriage temple to the marriage bed where the couple will be joined in one final "way."

In addition, the final line quoted above treats offhandedly both the Bishop of Canterbury, who performs the ceremony, and Bishop Valentine, who replaces Hymen ("Carmen 61") as the presiding religious spirit, thereby taking away from the solemnity of the event. The Bishop Valentine is slighted earlier in the epithalamion as well when he is given the "Aire" as his "Diocis" (2), assigned the birds as his "Parishioners" (4), and made the subject of conventional fescennine taunting: "This day, which might enflame thy self, Old Valentine" (14). No doubt, Donne transformed the Catholic figure Saint Valentine to the more Protestant figure Bishop Valentine in order to remain consistent with the emerging Protestant attitudes and ideals presented throughout the poem. However, because it is the Protestant Valentine rather than the Catholic Valentine who is slighted, the lines quoted above (2, 4, 14) may also be indicative of Donne's own feelings of ambivalence toward the

Protestant Church.

Donne also emphasizes the private through the idea of the platonic exchange of identities:

> Here lyes a shee Sunne, and a hee Moone here,
> She gives the best light to his Spheare,
> Or each is both, and all, and so
> They unto one another nothing owe. (85-88)

The first line quoted, which begins and ends with the word "here" and thus seems circular in that it ends where it begins, as well as the fact that the moon reflects the sun's light, communicates the idea of a self-contained, self-reflecting universe. Furthermore, because each reflects the other, "each is both" (87); however, each is also "all," suggesting the contraction of the universe into the lovers' solipsistic microcosm, a notion expressed in many of Donne's love lyrics such as "The Sunne Rising" (21-30), "The Canonization" (37-45), and "The Flea" (10-15). Moreover, all of these lines suggest the mutual love of the marital partners, a theme which is developed at other points in the epithalamion.

The invocation of "Two Phoenixes, whose joyned breasts/ Are unto one another mutuall nests" (23-24), is, however, the primary way in which Donne communicates the idea of the private, reciprocal, self-contained, and self-fulfilled universe of marital love. Like the phoenix in "The Canonization" where "to one neutrall thing both sexes fit" (25), the lovers in this poem are perfectly one. Moreover, the use of the phoenix, which "intrinsically celebrates

immortality achieved through repeated cycles of death and rebirth" (Dubrow, *Eden* 166), as a symbol of marital love attests to the infinite, a-historical, a-political nature of a romantic relationship.

By downplaying the political and public and enhancing the romantic love of the couple, Donne conveys not only his belief that marriage is essentially a private and personal contract, but also his mistrust of "outside" institutions. Anthony Low suggests that "Donne's getting to know and marrying Ann More [1601], and his losing for many years all hopes of preferment--drove him to a new kind of love poetry that came to dominate English and Western culture" (472). Donne had dared to marry a minor "without obtaining the patriarchal consent he knew would not be given" (Aers 49-50). Moreover, "that Donne was a member of the middle class, while Ann was of the gentry, further undermined the hierarchical norms of the time" (Brown 23-24). As a result of his illicit marriage Donne's secular career, upon which he based his identity,[3] was destroyed. In order to justify or to compensate for his decision to marry Ann More, Donne "initiates a reversal in the status of private love and public authority" (Brown 27). In poems such as "The Sunne Rising," which Zunder calls "a monument in the development of individualism in England" (87), "The Canonization," and "A Valediction: forbidding mourning," Donne facetiously establishes "the sphere of love as a realm superior to the ordinary social world" (Marotti 142). In fact, the realm of

the lovers sets the "standard against which political structures and social values should be measured" (Brown 24). Similarly, in poems such as "The Anniversarie" and "The Good-morrow," Donne presents the lover's world as a self-contained microcosm which transcends both time and space, "a magic circle of subjective immunity from outward political threat and from culturally induced anxiety" (Low 474). Undoubtedly, much of Donne's emphasis on the romantic aspects of marriage in this marriage song stems from the details of Donne's own life described above; however, it may also be the result of the Protestant trend towards viewing romantic love and family as a shelter from and a defense against the world as well as society's "intensified awareness of self [and] the cultivation of the private personality" (Norford 418).

Of course, although Donne uses conventions to stress the private, secular, and romantic aspects of the partners' relationship, that is not to say he ignores completely the public nature of seventeenth-century weddings. Donne does acknowledge the presence of the wedding guests, the performers, and the bride's matrons, and he does make it clear that the couple as well as the speaker participate in the festivities. However, Donne mediates between the public and private worlds most effectively through the reconciliation of societal norms and sexual urges. For example, while the use of the word "Satyres," who were lascivious creatures "barred from the paradise of Venus,

[but] frequently depicted as lurking in the vicinity waiting for a glimpse of the glory within" (Tufte 226), suggests that the lovers' paradise is isolated and protected, the final image does draw attention to the wedding guests and suggests both the literal and figurative proximity of the social and the sexual (Dubrow, "Tradition" 114):

> Rest now at last, and wee
> As Satyres watch the Sunnes uprise, will stay
> Waiting, when your eyes opened, let out day,
> Onely desir'd, because your face wee see. (103-06)

The public bedding of the marital partners as well as their public greeting the next morning reminds the reader not only of the genre's origins as a folk ritual performed outside of the couple's bedroom door (the literal translation of "epithalamion" is "at the bedchamber"), but also of the "peculiarly public character of wedding nights at the Jacobean court, from which the couple could only retreat by being behind the curtains of the bed" (Marotti 272). In fact, if bride or groom were a royal favourite, King James "would cross-question them closely the next morning to extract the last salacious details of the events of the night" (Stone, *Crisis* 294). We know from Chamberlain's letter that the king did, indeed, "visit these young turtles that were coupled on St. Valentine's day, and did strictly examine him whether he were a true son-in-law and was sufficiently assured" (Birch 226).

Donne resolves many of the tensions associated with immoderate sexuality, discussed in Chapter I, through the

conventional allusion to "due benevolence" or "the marriage debt":

> They unto one another nothing owe,
> And yet they doe, but are
> So just and rich in that coyne which they pay,
> That neither would, nor needs forbeare, nor stay;
> Neither desires to be spar'd, nor to spare. (88-92)

Thus, sexuality in general and the consummation of the marriage in particular are construed not as self-indulgent and uncontrollable forces but, rather, as socially sanctioned and even mandated responsibilities (Dubrow, *Eden* 25). Similarly, in the following lines,

> They quickly pay their debt, and then
> Take no acquittances, but pay again;
> They pay, they give, they lend, and so let fall
> No such occasion to be liberall, (93-96)

Donne addresses and resolves the Puritan fear of sexual over-indulgence through the language of debt and obligation which makes "sexuality seem less an anarchic and uncontrollable force and more a mercantile commodity subject to measurement and control" (Dubrow, *Eden* 167). Furthermore, the use of words such as "pay" and "lend" reflect "one way the marriage manuals civilize sex: they treat it as yet another form of work in the economy of the household" (Dubrow, *Eden* 169). However, by writing that the lover's "desires" (92) are satisfied and that they "quickly pay their debt" (93) and then "pay again" (94), Donne communicates the idea that sex is still a source of pleasure for both marital partners, even though it is sanctioned and controlled by society. The commercial language Donne uses

to describe the consummation also illustrates the "extraromantic awareness of the economic world" present in the "Lincolnes Inne" nuptial poem. Even though the Elizabeth-Palatine epithalamion undoubtedly affirms the amorous relationship as genuine, " the language of the poem suggests paradoxically that love is not simply an environment opposed morally to the system of bargaining, buying, selling, getting, and spending, but also that it is part of it" (Marotti, *Coterie* 145).

Donne "redefines" or "implies and advocates respect for sexuality in another way" (Dubrow, *Eden* 169) as well. While other poets, such as Henry Peacham, "typically place their references to the couple's children in the climactic final stanzas of the poem," Donne assigns a less prominent place for offspring in the second stanza, thereby implying that "he is comparatively uninterested in the idea" (Dubrow, "Tradition" 110):

> Two Phoenixes, whose joyned breasts
> Are unto one another mutuall nests,
> Where motion kindles such fires, as shall give
> Yong Phoenixes, and yet the old shall live. (23-26)

The children of the couple are portrayed as merely an extension of their phoenix parents, and Donne even goes so far as to break the legend by asserting that the old phoenix will live on after the new are born. Therefore, emphasis is placed, once again, on the bridal partners: they are both the source and the symbol of immortality. Moreover, because the narrative structure separates the consummation (stanzas

VII and VIII) and procreation (stanza II), "the poem as a whole implies that sexuality is not a mere means to an end but rather an end in itself" (Dubrow, *Eden* 169). Unlike the "Epithalamion made at Lincolnes Inne," which celebrates the Catholic idea of wedlock as a means for a woman to realize her potential for motherhood, this poem, although it does not completely disregard the prayer for children, celebrates the Protestant idea of marital sexuality as a means of mutual comfort and companionship. Thus, in this marriage song, Donne addresses the changing functions of marriage and marital sexuality as well as the changing motives to marry.

Donne also resolves many of the tensions associated with marital sexuality by "naturalizing" it. For example, the "fires" (25) of passion are not "a source of destruction, but a stage in the regenerative life cycle of the phoenix" (Dubrow, *Eden* 167) and, because they result in procreation, of nature itself. Similarly, by relating the consummation of this marriage to the mating of sparrows, larks, doves, and other birds (1-18), Donne "preserves the event from the unnaturalness and violence with which it is associated in his earlier epithalamium" (Dubrow, *Eden* 167). In addition, by willingly allowing himself to be led into a problem: two phoenixes are a contradiction since there can be only one, Donne is able to make the consummation natural in yet another way:

> And by this act of these two Phenixes
> Nature againe restored is,
> For since these two are two no more,

Ther's but one Phenix still, as was before. (99-102)

Hence, paradoxically, the private love of the couple embraces not only the social, but the natural and the universal as well.

Like the conventional epithalamion, Donne's marriage song for the Princess Elizabeth mediates between the demands of society and various natural forces, whether represented by the couple's own sexuality, as already discussed, or by the physical world itself (Dubrow, "Tradition" 107). Throughout the poem, Donne disarms potentially dangerous forces and figures which threaten the bridal couple and the state and links the natural and social realms. The sun, for example, is "tamed" or rendered harmless. It is not only thwarted by the bride's own brilliance and radiance, but wishes to be fueled or to derive further energy from the bridal couple:

> But oh, what ailes the Sunne, that here he staies,
> Longer to day, then other daies?
> Staies he new light from these to get?
> And finding here such store, is loth to set? (57-60)

Furthermore, in the concluding lines, the sun is completely disregarded and its power completely obliterated:[4]

> Others neare you shall whispering speake,
> And wagers lay, at which side day will break,
> And win by'observing, then, whose hand it is
> That opens first a curtaine, hers or his;
> This will be tryed to morrow after nine,
> Till which houre, wee thy day enlarge, O Valentine.
> (107-12)

Rather than the sun, the bridal partners themselves will bring the dawn of a new day.

Throughout the poem, one or both of the marital partners or their union is linked to both the earthly and the cosmic. For instance, through the comparison between the Princess Elizabeth's precious gems and the heavenly stars (33-36), Donne "conflates the natural and human worlds and in so doing praises the princess as a paragon in both spheres" (Dubrow, *Eden* 175). Similarly, the *rendez-vous* of the groom and the bride in the nuptial chamber conflates the domestic and the cosmic:

> But now she is laid; What though shee bee?
> Yet there are more delayes, For, where is he?
> He comes, and passes through Spheare after Spheare,
> First her sheetes, then her Armes, then any where. (79-82)

Each layer or realm the groom must travel through to reach his bride and consummate the marriage is compared to the region or space surrounding a heavenly body. Furthermore, through the image of the legendary bird, the phoenix, Donne simultaneously links the bride and bridegroom to the world of nature, to the more homely "lesser birds" (32), who, according to Chaucer's *Parliament of Foules*, also choose their mates on St. Valentine's Day (Grierson II:92), and elevates them to a mystical and mythical status (Dubrow, "Tradition" 109). Addressing Valentine, Donne writes:

> Till now, Thou warmd'st with multiplying loves
> Two larkes, two sparrowes, or two Doves,
> All that is nothing unto this,
> For thou this day couplest two Phoenixes;
> Thou mak'st a Taper see
> What the sunne never saw, and what the Arke
> (Which was of foules, and beasts, the cage, and park,)
> Did not containe, one bed containes, through Thee,
> Two Phoenixes.... (15-24)

The natural and the cosmic are, therefore, sources of neither awe nor fear: they "can be adapted to man's domain, and tamed to man's needs" (Dubrow, "Tradition" 109).

The image of the phoenix links not only the natural and the universal, but the sacred and the secular. Traditionally associated with the resurrection of Christ and the annunciation of Mary, the mystical bird becomes, in this poem, a symbol of the sexual consummation of the marriage as well as the marriage itself. As mentioned previously, the flaming death of the phoenix is associated quite readily with the "fires" of passion described in the second stanza. Similarly, because of the familiar seventeenth-century idea that to experience sexual climax is "to die," as well as the sexual connotations associated with resurrection or "rising," the use of the phoenix as a symbol of sexual love is almost inevitable (Montgomery 277). Hence, in "The Canonization," the lovers "dye and rise the same, and prove/ Mysterious by this love" (26-27). Furthermore, the phoenix is the perfect symbol of self-containment and self-perpetuation and, therefore, the perfect symbol of marital love. Like the phoenix, the platonic exchange of identities alluded to in lines 76-78 conflates the physical consummation--the bride vanishes "from her cloathes, into her bed" (77)--and the spiritual union in which "Soules from bodies steale, and are not spy'd" (78).

As Donne disarms the potentially dangerous figure of the sun and links the natural and the human, so he

overcomes the force of death by continuously emphasizing rebirth. As Dubrow points out, "fears that the bride or groom would die young haunted wedding celebrations, but those fears must have been particularly intense in the instance of Princess Elizabeth, since her brother, the beloved Prince Henry, had himself died shortly before her marriage" (Dubrow, *Eden* 132). However, although the poems written by Donne's contemporaries for this occasion are studded with allusions to the grave, Donne's very subtle references to death signal rebirth and, therefore, pacify his audience's as well as his own fear of death. For instance, "The Sparrow that neglects his life for love" (7) "unmistakably gestures towards the potential destructiveness of sexuality and the connections between marriages and funerals to which Donne alludes elsewhere" (Dubrow, *Eden* 166). However, because of the playful tone and the choice of the word "neglects" rather than "gives up" or "destroys," this reference does not bring with it a sense of doom one feels when reading the many references to the grave in Donne's "Lincolnes Inne" poem. Furthermore, this line may allude to the moment of spiritual union of the lovers or the "love-death in which the two lovers are said to be dead, to die to life that they may live to love" (Cirillo 81). In this case, indeed, "the main effect of this and the other allusions to birds is to rejoice in sexual vitality" (Dubrow, *Eden* 166).

Likewise, Donne portrays the loss of the bride's

virginity not through the harsh image of the ritual embowelling of a sacrificial lamb but, obviously evoking the commonplace connections between sexuality and the Fall, through the image of a star which "falls, but doth not die" (38). Instead the Princess becomes a greater, "new starre" (39) that "dost this day in new glory shine" (41). Unlike Donne's first marriage song, this poem contains nothing violent or unpleasant about the bride's transformation from maiden to matron. Rather, her metamorphosis is beautiful and dazzling. Similarly, the "fires" (25) of passion, which should act as a funeral pyre for the phoenix, are both a fountain of new life and a perpetuation of the old. The phoenix also subtly and vaguely signals political rebirth. Through its association with Queen Elizabeth, the phoenix became the symbol of "imperial *renovatio*, implying the return of that best rule under the One, when the world is most at peace, and justice, together with all other virtue reigns" (Yates 66). Thus, in this poem, the legendary bird seems to suggest the restoration of the golden age despite the death of Prince Henry.

By emphasizing the mutuality of love throughout the poem, Donne communicates his own feelings about arranged marriages,[5] attempts to resolve the tensions associated with the "mercenary" or arranged marriage, and (although much of what he writes about the bride is dictated by the political situation) addresses the changing status of women. As Stone points out, "on the wedding day the pair were often still

more or less strangers to one another" (*Crisis* 293). Such was the case for the Princess Elizabeth and the Elector Palatine, whose marriage was certainly not a match based upon love but, rather, one based on politics. In one of his letters, Chamberlain even comments on the fact that the Elector Palatine had learned only enough English to take his vows (Birch 226). By ignoring the political aspects of the union and instead portraying the couple as completely and mutually loving and blissful, Donne ensures, "in a period and class that did not always permit freedom of conjugal choice, that the act of marriage was a prudent and felicitous one" (Greene, "The Epithalamion" 14). Furthermore, the mutuality of love suggests the equality of the partners and invests the bride with a certain power. In the description of the consummation (Stanza VII), for instance, the "continuing slippage between the normally separate roles of lender and borrower, which recalls the slippages in gender roles earlier," suggests that the woman fully shares both the passion and the pleasure in its fulfillment (Dubrow, *Eden* 169). The dichotomy of "submissive female victim and respectful yet aggressive male attacker which is latent in the 'Epithalamion made at Lincolnes Inne'" is here eradicated (Dubrow, *Eden* 167): the relationship is, in this poem, one of reciprocity.

Donne invests the bride with authority and potency in a number of other ways as well. For instance, Donne reshapes the generic convention that the bride must rise because the

sun has already done so, which became a *topos* in English epithalamia after Spenser, by substituting "a combative bride who will rival and even surpass that celestial body" (Dubrow, "Tradition" 111):

> Up then faire Phoenix Bride, frustrate the Sunne,
> Thy selfe from thine affection
> Takest warmth enough, and from thine eye
> All lesser birds will take their Jollitie. (29-32)

Similarly, through the reversal of the usual associations of the sexes, "a shee Sunne" and "a hee Moone" (85), the bride appears to take on the more powerful role: "in the symbolic sense the bride is represented here as the source of strength and vitality for him and makes his life significant and worth-living" (Lodi 90). Lodi even suggests that this reversal may constitute "a veiled patriotic motive in exalting the English Princess married to the German Count Palatine" (90). Because the phoenix was often associated with Queen Elizabeth, the comparison of the Princess Elizabeth to the mythical bird also offers extravagant praise to the bride. Through his latent comparison Donne avoids the sycophancy of his contemporaries, such as George Wither, who offer overt comparisons between the two Elizabeths: "Donne is able to bestow praise more tacitly--and hence more tactfully" (Dubrow, "Tradition" 110). In addition, lines such as,

> Up, up, faire Bride, and call,
> Thy starres, from out their severall[6] boxes, take
> Thy Rubies, Pearles, and Diamonds forth, and make
> Thy selfe a constellation, of them All (33-36)

and "Bee thou a new starre" (39) also bestow upon the bride the power to transform herself.

While the lines quoted above highlight the power of the princess who figures in them, they also highlight the power of the poet who writes them (Dubrow, "Tradition" 112). For example, the line "Bee thou a new starre," attests not only to the power of the bride, but to the power of the poet who is able to transform her into a constellation through the very metaphor he creates (Dubrow, "Tradition" 112). Moreover, lines such as "frustrate the Sunne" (29), "Up, up, faire Bride, and call,/ Thy starres, from out their severall boxes" (33-34), and

> Come forth, come forth, and as one glorious flame
> Meeting Another, growes the same,
> So meet thy Fredericke, and so
> To an unseparable union growe, (43-46)

can be understood both as the respectful pleas of a subject who entreats the bride to rise, dress, and meet her groom, and as the commands of a knowledgeable guide who directs and controls the events of the wedding day. Thus, Donne employs the conventional role of master-of-ceremonies to establish the nature of his relationship to the royal princess in particular and to courtly society in general.

Unlike the speaker of the "Lincolnes Inne" epithalamion, who is an implied rather than an actual presence, and that of the Somerset-Howard marriage song, who purposely distances himself and his audiences from the couple and the events of the day, the speaker of this poem

is quite eager to stress his involvement in the nuptial celebrations. As mentioned previously, proximity to the festivities, excluding only the church ceremony and including even the consummation, is emphasized throughout the poem. Donne's sympathy for the partners who are kept from their "love-nest" as well as his description of the consummation is "uncommonly intimate" (Greene, "The Epithalamion" 210). Furthermore, he includes himself among the courtly all-night revelers who bed and wait to greet the couple the next morning. Despite the fact that Donne did not actually take part in the festivities,

> the whole performance in which Donne engages in the poem is that of a man proclaiming his own right to participate in this royal event at a high level of courtly society. Whatever the poem's function as a gift, it is clear that he assumes an audience of equals. (Marotti 272)

Through the elaborate praise of the princess and the expression of his desire to be connected with or to be a member of the court, Donne raises his own social status and reinforces or confirms the validity of the existing hierarchy.

Of course, this work, like the other occasional works composed during the last few years before his ordination, reflects "Donne's involvement in courtly society, his need for secular advancement, and his wish to benefit from a complex system of patronage" (Marotti 269); however, it should not be considered "not authentic." While the elaborate compliments directed at the Princess Elizabeth may

be indicative of "symbolic praise," they are not "inflated" or "insincere" since she was, indeed, thought of as a model to emulate by both society in general and Donne in particular. David Harris Wilson suggests that, with rare good judgment, James provided for his daughter's education by placing her away from the court with the Lord and Lady Harrington (282). The fact that she was left in the care of the parents of Lucy, Countess of Bedford, Donne's chief patroness, may have contributed to his admiration of and respect for the princess--Donne calls Elizabeth "the worthiest Princess of the world" (*Letters* 66)--and prompted him to write the epithalamion.[7] As a result of Elizabeth's separation from the environment of her father, "the darker side of the court seems to have left untouched this natural, gay, and innocent child" (David Harris Wilson 282). Thus, in the eyes of her contemporaries, Elizabeth truly was a figure of "affection" (30), "warmth" (31), and "Jollitie" (32).

Likewise, although this marriage song represents, for the most part, the ideal, it does so not because Donne follows generic conventions blindly, but because the wedding was, in fact, "the realization, as fully as this world allowed, of the ideal in the actual" (Milgate xxii-xxiii). Text and context coincided. The marriage of the Princess Elizabeth and the Count Palatine was "widely viewed as an antidote to the grief occasioned by the recent death of the bride's brother" (Akrigg 142), the beloved Prince Henry, who

had passed away only a few months prior to the wedding. This union and its subsequent political alliance, both of which Henry himself approved, enacted "the generic convention of replacing elegy with epithalamion, mourning with panegyric" (Dubrow, *Eden* 118) and restored hope of life into a kingdom so recently overwhelmed by death, a characteristic of the wedding Donne addresses in his epithalamion.

This hope of life included rebirth and transcendence not only in a biological sense, but in a political sense as well, for many of the political ambitions which died with Prince Henry were reborn through the union of Elizabeth and Frederick. The death of Prince Henry brought both grief and a sense of chaos to those who had built their expectations upon him. Unlike his father, Henry "early evinced a taste for martial exercise and military glory" (Akrigg 129). Thus, "those who wanted an active policy of war and expansion abroad had of course long since pinned their hopes upon Henry" (Akrigg 135). Similarly, unlike his father, Henry strongly and openly opposed the Catholics; therefore, "the Puritans, bitterly disappointed by King James's enthusiastic championship of the bishops, had persuaded themselves that the pious young prince would be their champion" (Akrigg 135). In addition, "as the court of his father became more and more recognized for the lax spend-thrift,...the English had increasingly either looked back nostalgically to the great days of Queen Elizabeth or had

promised themselves future greatness under King Henry" (Akrigg 135-36). Count Frederick, who had been a friend and ally of Prince Henry since he was delivered from the Gunpowder Plot (Lindsay 203), and who, according to Chamberlain owed "his mistress nothing if he were a king's son, as she is a king's daughter" (Birch 223), became the new Protestant champion. In fact, a number of elegies composed for the death of Prince Henry were addressed to the Count and "exhorted him to carry on in Henry's stead" (Lindsay 221).

Throughout his "Epithalamion, Or mariage Song on the Lady Elizabeth, and Count Palatine being married on St. Valentines day," Donne resolves many of the tensions associated with wedlock. While Donne always privileges his own preference--the private and secular--by reconciling sexual urges and social norms, "domesticating" nature and disarming various natural figures and forces, and suggesting that the union being celebrated embraces the mythic, mystical, and cosmic, he also asserts that the wedding is public, social, natural, universal, and sacred. Furthermore, by "taming" or "redefining" sexuality, Donne is able to resolve many of the problems associated with sexuality. Similarly, by emphasizing mutuality, instead of the troubled conjunctions of sexuality, violence, and submission that emerge in the "Epithalamion made at Lincolnes Inne," Donne is able to address the changing status of women as well as the changing functions of

marriage and reasons to marry. Throughout the poem, Donne also reconciles generic norms and poetic innovations. Donne incorporates most of the epithalamic conventions as practised by Catullus and Spenser and formulated by Scaliger, ignoring comparatively few of them (Sheehan 55). However, Donne's use of convention, the adaptation, naturalization and refinement of what already exists (Parfitt 13), also serves to underscore his own particular preferences, fears, and preoccupations as well as those of his society: Donne "appears to have relished the opportunity of adapting a genre some of whose norms were uncongenial to him, to have welcomed the challenge of playing the traditions of that genre against the demands of his individualistic talent" (Dubrow, "Tradition" 115). No doubt, the nation's admiration for the bride as well as the almost universal approval of the marriage made the royal wedding "the perfect occasion for a poem of panegyric" (Sheehan 51) and the poet's composition of that poem more enjoyable and less difficult. However, sometimes epithalamists were expected to create marriage poems for less than desirable couples who are married under less than ideal circumstances, as Donne was expected to create an epithalamion for the union of Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, and Lady Frances Howard, to which we now turn.

CHAPTER IV
THE "EPITHALAMION" FOR THE EARL OF SOMERSET

The epithalamic genre is one "specifically dedicated to the celebration of the ideal in the actual, in explicit rejection of the actual itself" (Hurley 364). This particular aspect of the genre was extremely important to any artist celebrating the scandalous marriage of Lady Frances Howard and Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, which took place on December 26, 1613, for it was clear to epithalamists and masquers alike that "anyone who tried to make too many detailed references to the precise situation between the king's favourite and his wife, was doomed both to disappointment and discredit" (McGowan 201), as was the poet George Chapman.[1] As a result, some artists redirected their praise from the personal characteristics of the bride and groom to their social positions (Hurley 363). Others ignored, for the most part, the bridal couple and concentrated attention on the figure of King James. In fact, as Margaret McGowan points out, in "all entertainments, the king remains the principal focus of interest and the marriage celebrations are primarily a means of honouring him" (199). However, while his contemporaries resorted to the use of "symbolic praise" and studiously avoided references to the circumstances leading up to the marriage, Donne, "partly to protect his integrity, and certainly because he would not let a lively appreciation of the idealisms concerning royalty and marriage cloud his eyes

to the actualities" (Milgate xxiv), like Chapman, includes many uncompromising allusions to the sordid events behind the Somerset-Howard union. However, because of his subtlety, his use of paradox, pun, and *double entendre* (which allow him both to compliment and to criticize), and his strict adherence to generic norms, Donne, unlike Chapman, did not suffer a disgrace. Throughout the eclogue and the epithalamion proper, Donne uses epithalamic conventions to communicate his conflicting attitudes toward the bridal couple and their union as well as toward the more general problems of the patronage system and the Jacobean court. Hence, the dismissal of this poem by critics, such as Marotti and Greene, as "insincere" or "inflated" is unwarranted.

Before examining the ways in which Donne communicates his attitudes toward the Somerset-Howard union and the court patronage system, I would like to provide some background information. In 1603, Robert Carr came to England from Scotland and began his career with King James as a page who ran beside the royal coach. However, English fashion called for footmen, not running pages, and Carr was subsequently dismissed. In 1607, Carr attracted the King's attention when, during a tilt, he fell from his horse and broke his leg. After recognizing and having a homosexual attraction to his former page, James demanded that he receive medical attention and visited him quite often. Shortly after this incident, Carr became the favourite and over a period of six

years was given a number of estates, such as those of Sir Walter Raleigh and Lord Maxwell, of which he was undeserving, and a number of titles and positions, such as Earl of Somerset and Secretary of State, for which he was completely unsuited (Akrigg 179-80). By 1613, Carr had become infatuated with and wanted to marry Lady Frances Howard, who was already married to Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex. In order to free herself for Carr, Howard claimed that her husband was impotent, a condition rumoured to have been caused by drugs administered by Howard herself, and, therefore, "sought to divorce him on the grounds that she was still virgo-intacta--a hypothesis to the falsity of which, it is said, several men about town could testify" (Carey 86). She was examined by a jury of twelve matrons in order to determine whether or not she was a virgin and, despite "the repeated assignations between the Countess and Carr [which] were already becoming known," the matrons certified her a virgin (Akrigg 184).

The king himself, who "could not resist the pleadings of his favourite" (David Harris Wilson 340), approved of the divorce and the remarriage of Howard to Carr and did everything in his power to make certain that his wishes were carried out. When a member of the court hindered Carr's cause, James would conveniently eliminate him as a threat. For instance, when Sir Thomas Overbury, Carr's own confidant and secretary, openly protested the divorce and remarriage, James, at Carr's request, offered him the vacant ambassador-

ship to France. When Overbury refused this position, he was imprisoned in the tower for contempt of the king's commands (Bald, *Drurys* 126). Similarly, the king meddled constantly in the deliberations of the commission he appointed to try the divorce case. James counseled some members to adjust their votes accordingly and, after realizing that they would not relent to his demands, assigned two more bishops to the panel, resulting in a vote of seven to five in favour of the divorce (David Harris Wilson 340-41).

If the circumstances of Carr's wedding made composing a marriage poem on the subject singularly unattractive, the circumstances of Donne's own career made doing so virtually unavoidable (Dubrow, "Sun in Water" 198). Even though Donne had "managed to move from relative poverty and social exile back into the prestigious social circles of City and Court, he was a painfully disappointed man in the period from 1602 to his ordination in 1615" (Marotti, *Coterie* 152). For ten years Donne struggled for advancement "through the mediation of friends, patrons, and patronesses, but his efforts were constantly thwarted and his serious ambitions unfulfilled" (Marotti, *Coterie* 152). For example, because of his slurs against the Elector Palatine, Drury, a patron in whom Donne had placed much hope, had himself fallen from grace and had thus proved to be unhelpful if not disadvantageous to Donne (Bald, *Drurys* 103). Furthermore, the deaths of Salisbury and Prince Henry left very few powerful political patrons or avenues to preferment other than Carr, who henceforth will

be referred to as Somerset, the king's favourite (Bald, *Life* 272). Thus, taking advantage of his connections to the influential James, Lord Hay, and Sir Robert Ker, a second cousin to the favourite, Donne appealed to Somerset in one final desperate attempt to secure a respectable secular office before taking the advice of many courtiers, including the king himself, to take holy orders (Bald, *Life* 271-72). Donne's desperation for preferment, his utter dependence on Somerset, and Somerset's "hold" on him is illustrated in one of the letters to his patron:

> After I was grown to be your Lordships, by all the titles that I could thinke upon, it hath pleased your Lordship to make another title to me, by buying me. You may have many better bargaines in your purchases, but never a better title then to me, nor any thing which you may call yours more absolutely and intirely. (*Letters* 247)

Similarly, his desperation is illustrated in yet another letter in which Donne professes "his ardour to write not merely an epithalamion but also a defense of the divorce" (Bald, *Life* 274):

> I can only say in generall, that Some appearances have been here, of some treatise concerning this Nullity, which are said to proceed from *Geneva*; but are beleeved to have been done within doors, by encouragements of some whose names I will not commit to this letter. My poor study having lyen that way, it may prove possible that my weak assistance may be of use in this matter, in a more serious fashion, then an Epithalamion. (*Letters* 156)

Fortunately, the prose defense was not needed since the attack was never published (Bald, *Life* 274).

Even though Somerset welcomed Donne with open arms, offering him the secretarial position made available by

Overbury's imprisonment and, no doubt, renewing Donne's hope for secular advancement, Donne was hardly uncritical of the events surrounding the marriage and more than a little wary about composing a poem celebrating two less than ideal courtiers and their less than ideal marriage, as many of his letters testify. For instance, in the letter quoted above, in which Donne expresses his wish to do more for Somerset than write a simple marriage song and the fact that this desire "made [him] therefore abstinent in that kinde," he goes on to write, "yet by my troth, I think I shall not scape. I deprehend in my self more then alacrity, a vehemency to do service to that company; and so, I may finde reason to make rime" (*Letters* 156). The word "scape" suggests that Donne was unwillingly bound to create a marriage song: in fact, according to Carey, Somerset did commission the epithalamion (87). Furthermore, as Dubrow points out, one "denotation of 'deprehend' is 'to catch...in...some evil or secret deed,' a meaning underscored by 'vehemency,' with suggestions of a loss of reason and balance, and by the denigration of the artistic process implied by 'make rhyme'" (Dubrow, "Sun in Water" 201). Hence, the letter divulges Donne's repugnance at his own motivations for commemorating the Somerset union, a repugnance which is "writ large in the poem to which it refers" (Dubrow, "Sun in Water" 201). Similarly, in a letter to the bridegroom's cousin, Donne complains of his inability to compose an epithalamion because he is experiencing a "writer's block" or a loss of

imagination:

> If my Muse were onely out of fashion, and but wounded and maimed like Free-will in the *Roman Church*, I should adventure to put her to an Epithalamion. But since she is dead, like Free-will in our Church, I have not so much Muse left as to lament her losse. (*Letters* 231)

Therefore, while the pressures of the patronage system enjoined defending and celebrating the match, moral pressures encouraged criticism. Like many of his letters, the eclogue which frames the epithalamion created to celebrate the marriage of Somerset and Lady Frances Howard illustrates the conflict between these two sets of pressures.

i) The Eclogue

Donne uses the conventional eclogue form, in which two shepherds vie in a singing match, not only to apologize for his absence from court and to explain the delay in the poem's completion, but, more importantly, to illustrate his self-division, that "odd mixture of willingness and reluctance" (Milgate xxiv) to write the poem and to succumb to the pressures of the patronage system. As Dubrow points out, the epithalamion is "a fundamentally dialogic medium: the dialogue that occurs explicitly in Catullus 62 and imitations of it is manifest in the paired opposites we find in other versions of the genre: nature against society, male against female, death against life, and so on" (*Eden* 197). The thematic structure of eclogue is founded on a complex set of contraries which are, of course, germane to the

eclogue form with which Donne chooses to frame the epithalamion proper: "the block 'East, Sun, Warmth, Light, King, and Heaven' opposes a second block 'Winter, West, North, Cold, Night, and Hell,' and their contrast extends itself through to the end of the poem" (McGowan 210). However, Donne also adapts this dialogic predilection of the genre to express "his own psychological conflicts about the personal costs of patronage" (Pinka 64). Thus, the dialogue between Allophanes and Idios, the two speakers of the eclogue, "illuminates Donne's relationship to generic patterns as well as psychological ones" (Dubrow, *Eden* 197).

Donne's ambivalence towards the court is embodied quite clearly within the figures of Idios, or "the private man who holds no place at Court," i.e. Donne, and Allophanes, or "one who seems like another," i.e. Sir Robert Ker, the bridegroom's cousin and a successful courtier (Grierson II:94). On the surface, the eclogue does not appear to be a debate, but poetry of praise in which both speakers extol the king and his style of government. For instance, in the opening dialogue, Allophanes "reprehends [Idios's] absence from court, at the mariage Of the Earle of Sommerset" (epigraph):

> Unseasonable man, statue of ice,
> What could to countries solitude entice
> Thee, in this yeares cold and decrepit time?
> Natures instinct drawes to warmer clime
> Even small birds, who by that courage dare,
> In numerous fleets, saile through their Sea, the aire.
> What delicacie can in fields appeare,
> Whil'st Flora'herselfe doth a freeze jerkin weare?
> Whil'st windes do all the trees and hedges strip

> Of leafes, to furnish roddes enough to whip
> Thy madnesse from thee; and all springs by frost
> Have taken cold, and their sweet murmure lost;
> If thou thy faults of fortunes would'st lament
> With just solemnity, do it in Lent, (1-14)

to which Idios replies that, although he is removed physically from the court, its influence overwhelms him still:

> As heaven, to men dispos'd, is every where,
> So are those Courts, whose Princes animate,
> Not onely all their house, but all their State. (40-42)

However, upon close examination, the eclogue "serves far more complex functions, and the identification of its characters is correspondingly more complex" (Dubrow, *Eden* 194) than critics such as Herbert Grierson, A.C. Partridge, Arthur Marotti, and Thomas Greene have acknowledged. Recently, critics such as Heather Dubrow have suggested that Idios and Allophanes represent different aspects of Donne himself.

Although Idios never openly disagrees with Allophanes, many of his statements are contradictory, ambiguous, and equivocal, suggesting Donne's self-division. For instance, paradoxical lines such as "No, I am there" (39) and "I am not then from Court" (54) highlight Donne's divided sensibilities. Similarly, Donne's ambivalent feelings towards the commemoration of this union are evident in Idios's ambiguous statements about whether or not his own ambition motivated the creation of this epithalamion. While the lines, "Reade then this nuptiall

song, which was not made/ Either the Court or mens hearts to invade" (99-100), suggest that the poem was created out of joy rather than an eager desire for patronage, the lines that follow,

> But since I'am dead, and buried, I could frame
> No Epitaph, which might advance my fame
> So much as this poore song, which testifies
> I did unto that day some sacrifice, (101-04)

suggest that Donne's need for secular preferment was, indeed, his incentive to compose the marriage song. These lines may also allude to the despair Donne felt or his realization of the futility of his efforts to secure a position at court: the celebration of this ignominious marriage is Donne's best and, perhaps, only hope for advancement. Moreover, the word "sacrifice" (104) hints that his nuptial offering to Somerset in particular and his dedication to the patronage system in general "is not without its price" (Dubrow, *Eden* 187): in the attempt to please a patron, one may lose personal and artistic integrity.

Throughout the eclogue, Idios tries to justify his distance from, while Allophanes tries to persuade him to submit to, the pressures of the court and the patronage system. After Allophanes describes the court and the king as well as Somerset himself in very flattering terms (69-91), Idios replies, "I knew/ All this, and onely therefore I withdrew" (92-93), suggesting that Donne would have preferred to remain detached from the court. However, Donne

goes on to qualify this statement:

> To know and feele all this, and not to have
> Words to expresse it, makes a man a grave
> Of his owne thoughts; I would not therefore stay
> At a feast, having no Grace to say. (94-97)

Of course, this passage illustrates the technique of self-deprecation, advocated by the king himself and often present in Donne's verse letters to patrons and patronesses in which he claims he is incapable of adequate praise. Nevertheless, these lines are also suggestive of censorship. Because he could not write freely about the wedding and the court, Idios was forced to withdraw. Although he withdrew from court, "being come/ Full of the common joy" (98) Idios wrote "this nuptiall song" (99); however, the preceding line, "And yet I scap'd not here" (97), is reminiscent of Donne's letter quoted earlier in which he suggests he is being coerced into writing the epithalamion rather than writing it out of his own free will. Finally, the last lines Idios speaks, "As I have brought this song, that I may doe/ A perfect sacrifice, I'll burne it too" (226-27), suggest "a desire to destroy the poem and hence not participate in the event" (Dubrow, *Eden* 199). Despite Idios's attempts to distance himself from the court, in the end Allophanes is victorious. With disenchantment Idios, or Donne, "dutifully submits his nuptial song" (Tufte 227).

Dubrow suggests that Allophanes stands for Donne's attraction to the court, while Idios bodies forth the reluctance to participate in that world; Allophanes

represents Donne's willingness to please a patron, while Idios expresses the poet's doubts about the task; Allophanes is the successful courtier Donne wanted to be, while Idios is the failed courtier he sensed he really was ("Sun in Water" 212). Although Dubrow's analysis of the two speakers is probably more accurate than that of Margaret McGowan, who suggests that apparently contrary arguments reinforce Idios's and Allophanes's shared view of the court (211), I would like to suggest that Donne's use of the two personae is more complicated and complex than even Dubrow acknowledges, for much of what Allophanes says is also multivalent.

Much of Allophanes's apparent praise of the court hints at some of the negative aspects of the patronage system. For instance, by turning the pastoral convention on its head with the suggestion that it is the court rather than the countryside which is characterized by "warmth" (4), "Spring" (15), and "Sunne" (16), Allophanes seems to be making a great tribute to the court as the centre of all life and joy. However, Donne may be communicating the hardships of and the death of all political hopes for those who do not wish to conform to the standards set by the court. In fact, Allophanes's description of the countryside is very similar to Donne's description of Mitcham, his country home, which he relates in one of his verse letters (see *Letters* 55). In short, through Allophanes's contrast between court and country, Donne implies that those who do not succumb to the

pressures of the court are exiled to a barren land, as he himself was for his marriage to Ann More. Similarly, later in the eclogue, while seemingly recording the virtues of James and Somerset, Allophanes touches upon one of the main problems with royal patronage. Allophanes asks Idios if he has ever read of

> A Court, where all affections do assent
> Unto the Kings, and that, that Kings are just?
> And where it is no levity to trust?
> Where there is no ambition, but to'obey,
> Where men need whisper nothing, and yet may;
> Where the Kings favours are so plac'd, that all
> Finde that the King therein is liberall
> To them, in him, because his favours bend
> To vertue, to the which they all pretend? (76-84).

Although this passage defends the king's bestowal of favours and compliments Somerset on his generosity, it also brings the difficulties of single-faction rule to the attention of the reader: Somerset is the only available avenue to preferment. Furthermore, the word "pretend" (84), which already carried the negative meaning "to deceive" along with the neutral meaning "to profess" (*O.E.D.* 12:432), gives the reader the impression that Somerset is not generous and that the members of the court are hypocritical.

Allophanes points not only to the problems of the patronage system, but to the more general problems of the Jacobean court. While Allophanes describes James's court with adjectives such as "zeale and love" (37) and "everlasting East" (38), his description of "other Courts" (33) is equally applicable to James's own court and to the behaviour of the bridal couple. The pun on "darke plotts"

(34), meaning both "land in darkness" and "evil designs," hints at the insidious and dangerous world of the Jacobean court. Certainly, the word "lust" (35) appropriately describes the sexual laxness of James's court as well as Lady Frances's and Somerset's uncontrolled passions. The word "envy" (35) may refer to the jealousy and resentment invoked by single-faction rule as well as the other courtiers' probable feelings toward Somerset. The world "artificiall" (36), of course, suggests the false and duplicitous nature of the court of James I.

Allophanes's tributes to the bridal couple are also double-edged. For instance, after questioning Idios (76-84), Allophanes then goes on to tell him that, although he has never read of such a virtuous court and generous king, "yet here was this, and more,/ An earnest lover, wise then, and before" (85-86). Of course, the "earnest lover" is Somerset whom Allophanes compares to a "tamed" or "matured" Cupid:

> Our little Cupid hath sued Livery,
> And is no more in his minority,
> Hee is admitted now into that brest
> Where the Kings Counsells and his secrets rest. (87-90)

While this passage exemplifies one of the main functions of the epithalamion, the reconciliation of the social and the sexual, it draws attention to the couple's former indecent behaviour. Even though Allophanes calls Somerset a "wise" and "earnest" lover, by comparing him to Cupid who, although now "tamed," was once a reckless and immature force of raw

sexuality, he suggests that Somerset, like Cupid, has allowed his passions to control him in the past. In addition, the fact that Somerset is admitted into the king's "brest" may be a vague reference to their homosexual love affair. Furthermore, the word "secrets" can be understood in two ways. James was very fond of what he called the mysteries of the state or *arcana imperii*; therefore, this statement can be read positively. However, "secrets" are also reminiscent of the "darke plotts" (34) or evil designs discussed earlier. Likewise, Allophanes's description of the bride can be understood as both compliment and criticism:

> Then from those wombes of starres, the Brides bright eyes,
> At every glance, a constellation flyes,
> And sowes the Court with starres, and doth prevent
> In light and power, the all-ey'd firmament;
> First her eyes kindle other Ladies eyes,
> Then from their beames their jewels lusters rise,
> And from their jewels torches do take fire,
> And all is warmth, and light, and good desire. (25-32)

On one level, Donne seems to be complimenting the bride on her sun-like beauty and her power to enlighten and warm the court; however, on another level, with the line "her eyes kindle other Ladies eyes" (29), Donne may be commenting on the uncontrolled passion the bride has displayed and how her example may influence other ladies of the court.

ii) The Epithalamion Proper

Throughout the epithalamion proper, Donne employs generic conventions to expand upon many of the themes introduced in the eclogue: he distances the speaker, the

internal audience, and the reader from the events of the day, comments on the peculiarities of this particular wedding and the circumstances surrounding it, and examines some of the more general problems of the patronage system and the court itself. In most epithalamia, including Donne's own marriage song written for the Princess Elizabeth, the speaker actively participates in the events of the wedding day, acting as both master-of-ceremonies and guest. Usually this convention is capitalized upon by epithalamists because it allows them to "act out a fantasy that they are important members of the court in which they may have felt marginal" (Dubrow, *Eden* 139). However, in this marriage song, Donne generally assumes the role of observer, "contemplating" (129) the couple (Dubrow, "Sun in Water" 206-07). Instead of using generic norms to stress the proximity, the immediacy of the event and his own involvement in it, as he does in the Elizabeth-Palatine poem, Donne uses epithalamic conventions to distance the speaker. For instance, in stanza four, which is the customary awakening of the bride, there are none of the direct commands, such as "Up then faire Phoenix Bride" (29) or "Up, up, faire Bride" (33), that one sees in the Elizabeth-Palatine epithalamion, suggesting that Donne would rather relinquish his role as conductor of the celebration and, instead, emphasize his absence from the scene. Similarly, the conventional light-hearted banter as well as the intimate and playful tone one finds in Donne's second

wedding poem is not present here. Instead, the speaker gives the partners a benediction to ensure their happiness and to emphasize the religious solemnity of the marriage. Of course, while the distancing involved in substituting the role of observer for those of guest and master-of-ceremonies may suggest the speaker's awed respect, this technique also illustrates Donne's doubts about participating in this occasion (Dubrow, "Sun in Water" 207).

Donne uses generic norms to distance not only the speaker, but the reader and the internal audience as well. Donne employs the epithalamic convention of tracing the events of the wedding day in chronological order, introduced in "Carmen 61," to convey the impression of distance. By subtitling each stanza, much like framing the epithalamion proper with an eclogue, Donne removes his readers from the action and, thus, makes them feel like detached observers (Dubrow, "Sun in Water" 207). Similarly, Donne distances the internal audience of the poem, thereby reminding his reader that he was not alone in his distaste for the wedding. Epithalamic convention dictates that the members of the community participate in the events of the day, fulfilling the roles which are assigned to them; however, the use of this convention is problematic in the case of the Somerset-Howard epithalamion, for, as Chamberlain points out, "the Mariage was on Sunday, without any such bravery as was looked for. Only some of the Earl's followers bestowed cost upon themselves; the rest exceeded not either in number

or expence" (Nichols 725). Furthermore, although the Inns of Court

> initially planned to collaborate on a joint masque, in the end only Gray's Inn staged a masque...the other Inns dropped out of the project, possibly because of their dislike of the marriage. Only after a strong pressure from the king did the City provide a wedding masque. (Norbrook 205-06)

Chamberlain writes that he heard "little or no commendation of the masque made by the lords that night, either for device or dancing, only it was rich and costly" (Birch 285). Moreover, despite the fact that Somerset was James's current favourite, only a few poets most desperate for preferment celebrated the union with congratulatory wedding poetry. As a result, while in the Elizabeth-Palatine poem members of the community fulfill the roles which are assigned to them, the masquers perform and the maidens undress the bride, there are no masquers--only "masks" (191)--or maidens in this marriage song. The distancing of the internal audience reminds the reader that most of Donne's contemporaries, too, found the participation in the events unattractive (Dubrow, "Sun in Water" 207).

Throughout the epithalamion proper, Donne uses generic norms both to compliment and to criticize, to illustrate both his willingness or need and his reluctance to write the poem and to participate in the wedding. The bestowal of praise upon the bride and groom is one of the most important epithalamic conventions; however, while seemingly praising the pair, Donne comments on the peculiarities of the wedding

and the circumstances surrounding it. In stanza two, for instance, Donne writes:

> But undiscerning Muse, which heart, which eyes,
> In this new couple, dost thou prize,
> When his eye as inflaming is
> As hers, and her heart loves as well as his?
> Be tryed by beauty, and than
> The bridegroome is a maid, and not a man.
> If by that manly courage they be tryed,
> Which scornes unjust opinion; then the bride
> Becomes a man. Should chance or envies Art
> Divide these two, whom nature scarce did part? (116-25)

While, on the surface, Donne seems to be praising the groom's beauty and the bride's courage and, perhaps, alluding to the platonic exchange of identities which accompanies a love union, Donne is illustrating also his awareness of the sordid events surrounding the wedding. The word "tryed" (120, 122) is faintly reminiscent of the courtroom drama which preceded the marriage (Pinka 65) and the use of the adjective "beauty" (120) to describe the groom draws attention to the effeminacy of Somerset. Similarly, the "courage" (122) of the bride, who "scornes unjust opinion" (123) reminds the reader of the other courtiers' negative feelings about the divorce and remarriage and of the bride's defiance. In addition, by attributing the "unjust opinion" of the multitude to "envies Art" (124 emphasis mine), Donne recalls, as he does in the eclogue, the probable feelings of resentment and jealousy the courtiers felt towards Somerset. As well, by claiming that "nature" (125) itself did not part the lovers, Donne suggests that the union is natural and inevitable. However,

because "nature" may refer also to biological or sexual attraction, Donne is, perhaps, commenting on the illicit passion of the lovers prior to their marriage. Similarly, in stanza three with the lines "Though it be some divorce to thinke of you/ Singly, so much one are you two" (127-28), Donne seems to be complimenting the partners on the strength of their love and commitment; however, the use of the word "divorce" (127) reminds the reader of the lack of commitment the bride had to her first husband, the Earl of Essex.

Even while seemingly defending and blessing the couple and, perhaps, justifying his own part in the wedding celebration, Donne points to their improprieties. Unlike his Elizabeth-Palatine epithalamion, in which Donne implies that the physical and emotional union of the couple is more important than the way they are joined by the priest, this poem, like most Renaissance epithalamia including Spenser's, makes the church ceremony central:

> Now from your Easts you issue forth, and wee,
> As men which through a Cipres see
> The rising sun, doe thinke it two,
> Soe, as you goe to Church, doe thinke of you,
> But that vaile being gone,
> By the Church rites you are from thenceforth one.
> The Church Triumphant made this match before,
> And now the Militant doth strive no more;
> Then, reverend Priest, who Gods Recorder art,
> Doe, from his Dictates, to these two impart
> All blessings, which are seene, or thought, by Angels eye or heart. (160-70)

These lines, much like the sacrificial imagery (104, 226-29) and the religious references to priests (233) and altars (235) in the eclogue, lend respectability to the union and

the poet's celebrations of it. However, by implying that the "Militant," namely the Archbishop of Canterbury, the bishop of London, and the three doctors of law who had voted with them against the divorce, were vainly trying to circumvent the will of heaven or the "Church Triumphant" (Carey 87), Donne alludes to the scandalous trial which preceded the wedding. Similarly, in the conventional blessing or "Benediction" which follows, Donne introduces negative ideas into an otherwise positive stanza:

> Blest payre of Swans, Oh may you interbring
> Daily new joyes, and never sing,
> Live, till all grounds of wishes faile,
> Till honor, yea till wisedome grow so stale,
> That, new great heights to trie,
> It must serve your ambition, to die. (171-76)

The words "ambition" (176) and "great heights" (175) remind the reader of the couple's desire for political power. Moreover, when understood in the sexual sense, the word "die" (176) also reminds the reader of the couple's illicit passion.

Throughout the whole epithalamion, Donne uses heat, sun, and fire imagery,[2] which became conventional in the seventeenth century, to comment upon the uncontrolled passion of the bride while seemingly complimenting her on her sun-like beauty. While the refrain "inflaming eyes" may be a compliment expressing the bride's brilliance, because it was believed in the Renaissance that the "eye-beams of lovers become entangled when they fall in love," it may also be a comment on love that is tainted by lust, lust which

may have a negative influence on the other courtiers (Dubrow, "Sun in Water" 205). If this is the case, Donne's later request that Lady Frances shed a tear to douse the light, thereby enabling the participants to look safely on her radiance, is not completely innocent:

> For our ease, give thine eyes th'unusual part
> Of joy, a Teare; so quencht, thou maist impart,
> To us that come, thy inflaming eyes, to him, thy loving heart. (146-49)

Again, while Donne flatters the bride, he alludes, as he does in the eclogue with the line "her eyes kindle other Ladies eyes" (29), to the dangers of Lady Frances Howard: in effect, she has the power to "burn" the courtiers.

The reference to Phaeton, a figure frequently used by Renaissance writers as an example of the "overreacher," also communicates the bride's power to harm her wedding guests:

> Pouder thy Radiant haire,
> Which if without such ashes thou would'st weare,
> Thou, which to all which come to looke upon,
> Art meant for Phoebus, would'st be Phaeton. (142-45)

On one level, these lines merely refer to a common method of adorning the hair and, again, serve to flatter Lady Frances. However, on another level, Donne warns the bride that she must control her passion to be too close to those in power, lest, like the arrogant Phaeton, she destroy herself and those around her (Dubrow, "Sun in Water" 208). The reference to hair in the lines quoted above is significant for another reason as well. Because hair is used often as a symbol of sexuality and fertility, by suggesting that Lady Frances dim the lustre of her hair, Donne is suggesting also

that she should dim the fires of her sexual passion before she inflames the other members of the court. Furthermore, like the Princess Elizabeth, Lady Frances wore her hair flowing down her back, the mark of a virgin. Certainly, by referring so specifically to her hair, Donne is making a comment not only on the impropriety of the bride's behaviour before her wedding, but on the insolent and deceptive nature of the bride.

The unchaste and deceitful nature of the bride is communicated further in stanza five:

> Thou cloudst thy selfe; since wee which doe behold,
> Are dust, and wormes, 'tis just
> Our objects be the fruits of wormes and dust;
> Let every Jewell be a glorious starre,
> Yet starres are not so pure, as their spheares are.
> (151-56 emphasis mine)

Like the tear the bride sheds, her garments and jewels dim her radiance, allowing the spectators to look upon her without harm; however, this compliment may be understood as criticism. Her beautiful clothes may disguise her true nature much as Cupid's livery disguises the true nature of Somerset: she too is clothed in court respectability. In addition, by belittling the wedding guests to the point where they "Are dust, and wormes" (153), Donne implicates all of the participants in court hypocrisy. It is also significant that the forces which clothe the bride are the same forces associated with man's death and decay. Perhaps, these lines comprise another subtle warning to the bride, to be more cautious in her aspirations for political power.

Although Lady Frances tries to disguise her faults with clothes and jewels, Donne goes on to assert, her true nature will always be present:

> And though thou stoope, to'appeare to us in part,
> Still in that Picture thou intirely art,
> Which thy inflaming eyes have made within his loving heart.
> (157-59 emphasis mine)

The word "stoope," meaning both "to condescend to one's inferiors" and "to lower or degrade one's self morally" (*O.E.D.* 16:772), again both compliments and criticizes. While it may suggest the bride's superiority, it may suggest as well her deceitfulness in trying to conceal her true identity from the wedding guests. Moreover, by suggesting that Somerset knows Lady Frances's full glory, Donne also suggests that he knows her without her courtly trappings (i.e. clothes).

Flattery of the groom, like that of the bride, functions as both compliment and criticism. For instance, lines such as "having laid downe in thy Soveraignes brest" (133) remind the reader of the king's homosexuality and the distasteful way in which Somerset has come to power. This line, when taken in conjunction with the following lines,

> All businesses, from thence to reinvest
> Them, when these triumphs cease, thou forward art
> To shew to her, who doth the like impart,
> The fire of thy inflaming eyes, and of thy loving heart,
> (134-37)

comments not only on the passive nature of the king, who was "too lazy and indifferent about affairs, too given to pleasure, allowing all business to be conducted by others"

(Goldberg, *James I* 82), but also on the ineffectuality of Somerset in dealing with his new position as secretary. Likewise, the subtitles "Raysing of the Bridegroome" and "Equality of persons" recall the fact that James elevated his favourite from Viscount Rochester to Earl of Somerset just before the wedding so that his rank would equal that of his bride (Pinka 66).

Donne uses generic norms to comment not only on the bridal pair and their wedding, but on the more general faults of the court itself. For instance, Donne employs the conventional complaint in the delay of the proceedings to comment not only upon this wedding in particular, but upon James's court in general:

> But you are over-blest. Plenty this day
> Injures; it causeth time to stay;
> The tables groane, as though this feast
> Would, as the flood, destroy all fowle and beast.
> (182-85)

On its most primary level, the passage illustrates the gluttony and extreme excess of James's court, for, despite the stringency of his finances, James bore the cost of the marriage and even sold crown lands to provide a gift of jewels for the bride (David Harris Wilson 243). Furthermore, the lines "Plenty this day/ Injures" (182-83) remind the reader of those offended or harmed by the marriage, such as Overbury, Essex, and the members of the commission who voted against the divorce. As well, because culinary overindulgence was often used as a metaphor for sexual overindulgence, this passage suggests the sexual

laxness and liberality of the Jacobean court and of the lust in which the bride and groom were rumoured to have indulged.

Conventionally, the epithalamic genre links the couple and the community, as Donne's Elizabeth-Palatine epithalamion does, by illustrating harmony between sexual drives and social norms. However, because this marriage intensifies rather than resolves the conflict between sex and society, each time Donne employs epithalamic conventions to "tame" or "redefine" sexuality, he draws attention to certain aspects of the union better left unacknowledged. For instance, by commenting upon the bride's modesty and fears, and urging her to come forth, Donne attempts to illustrate the subordination of sexual drives to social norms:

> What mean'st thou Bride, this companie to keep?
> To sit up, till thou faine wouldst sleep?
> Thou maist not, when thou art laid, doe so.
> Thy selfe must to him a new banquet grow,
> And you must entertaine
> And doe all this daies dances o'r againe. (193-97)

However, while supposedly complimenting the bride on her maidenly modesty as well as on her dedication to courtly duties, Donne draws attention to an area better left alone, for most courtiers knew of Lady Frances's promiscuity and her propensity to put her sexual urges before her social responsibilities. The bride's chastity is undercut less subtly in the following lines:

> As he that sees a starre fall, runs apace,
> And findes a gellie in the place,
> So doth the Bridegroome hast as much,
> Being told this starre is falne, and findes her such.

(204-07)

In Renaissance epithalamia, the virgin, when married, was often likened to a star that "falls"; however, a woman takes her place (Raizis 9). Thus, in Donne's second wedding poem, the Princess Elizabeth becomes "a new starre" (39). In contrast, in this poem, the groom finds his star already fallen, suggesting that Lady Frances's virginity was lost prior to her wedding night, and he is left with only a "gellie" or the remains of a fallen star or meteor (Carey 144).

In the same vein, when describing the meeting of the bride and groom to consummate the marriage, Donne offers a tribute to the partners for their innocence and purity:

> And as friends may looke strange,
> By a new fashion, or apparrells change,
> Their soules, though long acquainted they had beene,
> These clothes, their bodies, never yet had seene. (208-11)

However, while these lines may allude to both the ancient wedding rite of the exchange of apparel by the wedding participants (Tufte 228), and the platonic exchange of identities--apparently the couple's love is so strong they need not become one physically in order to become one spiritually--they also call to mind the stories of numerous clandestine encounters between Howard and Somerset and, perhaps, the dubious verdict of the virginal examiners (Pinka 66).

Most epithalamists "tame" sexuality by suggesting that it is a means of reproduction; however, because it may draw

attention to the putative impotence of Frances Howard's first husband, the conventional epithalamic prayer for offspring was a potentially explosive motif (Dubrow, "Sun in Water" 200). Donne successfully avoids this problem by separating, as he does in his marriage song for the Princess Elizabeth, the sexual act from the wish for children and by stressing social rather than biological reproduction:

> Raise heires, and may here, to the worlds end, live
> Heires from this King, to take thankes, you[rs], to give,
> Nature and grace doe all, and nothing Art. (177-79)

However, the fact that the king is central, as he is throughout the eclogue in both the speeches of Idios and Allophanes, is very telling. Donne's direct appeal to the king may illustrate his desperation for preferment or his nervousness about the political longevity of any of James's favourites. No doubt, his knowledge that favourites "fell from grace" quickly, as Somerset's own fall was to demonstrate shortly, "encouraged him to cover his options by flattering the ultimate source of bounty rather than simply devoting the poem to praising its conduit" (Dubrow, "Sun in Water" 203). Most importantly, however, the centrality of James serves to implicate him in the dubious events behind the wedding: to praise him was to acknowledge his responsibility for the marriage (Dubrow, "Sun in Water" 203).

One final way Donne censures the wedding is through the use of numerology (Dubrow, "Sun in Water" 209). While both

the "Epithalamion made at Lincolnes Inne" and "An Epithalamion, Or mariage song on the Lady Elizabeth, and Count Palatine" contain eight stanzas because of that number's connection with Juno, patroness of marriage (Fowler, *Triumphal Forms* 153), this epithalamion is comprised of eleven stanzas each consisting of eleven lines. In the Middle Ages the number eleven was often associated with transgression, for, as Saint Augustine, whose work Donne knew well, declared, "Surely then the number eleven, passing ten as it does stands for trespassing against the law and consequently for sin" (*The City of God against the Pagans* 4:535). Thus, through the basic form of the marriage song, Donne expresses his disapproval of the couple who have "trespassed against the law" and, perhaps, of his own actions, for as Dubrow asserts, "Donne is violating his own moral dictates in praising the couple" ("Sun in Water" 210).

Through his subtlety, his use of paradox, pun, and *double entendre*, and his strict adherence to epithalamic conventions, Donne is able both to compliment and to criticize the bridal couple and to make both positive and negative comments on the patronage system and the Jacobean court. While it is likely that Donne includes these devices in the poem for the perceptive seventeenth-century reader to discover, it is also likely that Donne wrote the poem as he did in order to retain a certain amount of personal and artistic integrity while remaining within the parameters of the patronage system. While some critics, such as Thomas

McLernon Greene and Arthur Marotti, provide, for the most part, derogatory criticism of this poem, and while the poem's images and language are not as beautiful and its tone not as playful as those of the Elizabeth-Palatine poem, this poem is, in my opinion, the most ingenious of Donne's three epithalamia. Donne seems to address and resolve not only the tensions associated with wedlock, but those associated with the patronage system as well.

CONCLUSION

Because of the success of the "new criticism," which posits the belief that authorial intention and the historical, sociological, and political contexts surrounding a work of literature are extrinsic to its meaning, many critics have subjected Donne's wedding poetry to narrow comparative studies which tend to state the obvious in terms of form, imagery, and theme. On the other hand, it seems that critics, such as Arthur Marotti and David Novarr, who do take into consideration environmental pressures have misinterpreted or disregarded completely Donne's epithalamia as "not credible" simply because they fall into the category of occasional verse. However, Graham Parry suggests that panegyric, elegy, and all poems of occasion have recently enjoyed a revival of esteem because "such poems take us into the process of assessment of men and events by writers who were very closely involved or were well placed to judge" (2). Poets and prose writers created works of literature which addressed particular issues and problems that exerted pressure on the time. While writers were conscious of genres and conventions, as well as the innumerable tropes of rhetoric, these norms were not ends in themselves, but means to an end, "serviceable instruments that allowed access to the larger subjects that exercised men's imaginations" (Parry 5).

I have attempted, in this thesis, to illustrate that to

ignore both the socioeconomic and the political pressures which acted upon Donne, as well as Donne's own beliefs and preoccupations, is to ignore information necessary to a fuller appreciation of his wedding poetry. Also, I have attempted to illustrate that, despite the tendency of critics to dismiss them as "insincere" or "not authentic," Donne's epithalamia are representative of both the time in which they were composed and their writer. Although he draws upon and strictly adheres to a vast stockpile of conventional features, themes, and *topoi* used by both classical poets, such as Sappho, Aristophanes, Theocritus, and Catullus, and Renaissance contemporaries, such as Spenser, Jonson, Crashaw, and Herrick, Donne adapts certain generic norms in order to illustrate his own attitudes and opinions, to communicate or to resolve anxieties characteristic of his society, and to comment on the particular wedding being celebrated. For instance, the "Lincolnes Inne" poem clarifies, while the Elizabeth-Palatine poem resolves, the tensions associated with Stuart marriage and Stuart marriage poetry, and the Somerset-Howard poem exemplifies and consciously explicates the problems associated with the patronage system and with the Jacobean court.

Shawcross asserts that authors write to three ends:

> to prove to her- or himself and to others that she or he could accomplish a poem in a specific genre..., to communicate to readers the ideas or connotations related to intended meaning..., [and] to transcend that genre, thereby achieving another level of evaluation

> comparison with other writers working within that same genre, and thereby also achieving further meaning for the literary work in terms of variations from the standard. (35)

When placed within both the literary tradition to which they belong and the context which inspired them, Donne's epithalamia, the "Epithalamion made at Lincolnes Inn," "An Epithalamion, Or mariage Song...," and the "Epithalamion" for the Earl of Somerset, certainly exemplify the accomplishment of all three ends.

NOTES

Introduction

1. The lyric was the most popular form in the English Renaissance because, as George Parfitt points out, it "suits a period in which poetry is mainly produced by people who do not earn their livings by writing it. Although not exclusively a court product, lyric is strongly influenced by court, and suits the courtly view of poetry as one of the social accomplishments of the gentry. There is, in fact, no major lyric poet of the century who works at any great distance from the genteel....Moreover, lyric is not only socially convenient (its brevity suiting the amateur) but tends to be highly decorative. Brevity facilitates polish and the codification of themes and images, and it is in such codification and polish that the self-conscious image-making of courtly worlds is expressed" (10).

2. The "erotic" tradition began in Neo-Latin and Continental Europe with the Renaissance writers Johannes Secundus (1511-36) and Joannes Jovianus Pontanus (1426-1503). Other ways in which Neo-Latin and Continental epithalamia influenced the English tradition are: 1) the increased emphasis on the political, topographical, historical, and patriotic motifs and on the golden age *topos* introduced by Catullus; 2) the increased use of the epithalamion as a panegyric for members of royal or wealthy families or as a dedication to a special person or occasion; and 3) the use of the epithalamion as a vehicle for philosophy, social commentary, and moral instruction (Tufte 87-88).

Chapter I

1. For the poets of the Renaissance, an elaborate restatement of the principles of the Greek and Roman rhetoricians was made by Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484-1558) in the long section on the epithalamion in his *Poetices libri septem*, published posthumously in 1561. In English, the most important early rhetorical treatise was Thomas Wilson's *The Arte of Rhetorike*, published in 1553. Although this treatise does not deal with the epithalamion as such, the two sections on techniques suitable for praise of noble persons are of significance to the epithalamic tradition. A work more specifically concerned with literary form is the chapter on the epithalamion or "bedding ballad" in *The Arte of English Poesie*, attributed to George Puttenham and published in 1589. For summaries of these and other works, see Tufte 128-38.

2. In the conclusion of her book, Tufte claims that "after reviewing the assortment of literary works which poets have called epithalamia," the two concepts which underlie all of

them are *union* and *order* (255).

3. The parallels between the social, earthly, and cosmic realms must have helped to perpetuate the "doctrine of correspondences" (between the micro-, geo-, and macrocosm) which was so popular during the Renaissance (see Nicholson 7).

4. A section of *Basilikon Doron*, a book of advice written for Prince Henry whom James expected to inherit the throne, is dedicated to marriage. In this section, James comments on the reasons to marry, the necessary chastity of both partners before and their faithfulness to each other after marriage, the importance of being the same religion, and the inferior and subordinate status of the wife to her husband (*Political Works* 33-37).

5. However, the use of extravagant praise was not as simple as it seems, for it remained unacceptable for a poet to descend into uttermost sycophancy.

6. Lewalski claims that "symbolic praise" is not used in the epithalamia which celebrate the occasion of marriage rather than individuals; however, in wedding poetry not only the institution of marriage, but the bride and groom are idealized. Thus, when complimenting the bridal pair, "symbolic praise" can be and, I believe, is used. Most critics agree with Lewalski that seventeenth-century poets use "symbolic praise" even though they do not refer to it as such. Margaret McGowan, for example, calls the technique "generalising" (175) and George Parfitt simply states that poets praise their patrons by presenting them as models or ideals or as "exemplifying the moral standards by which society operates or should operate" (90-91).

7. The medieval tradition is believed by Sheehan to have begun in the fifth century A.D. with Sidonius Apollinaris and to have reached its peak in the thirteenth century with John of Garland (20).

8. Sir Philip Sidney's epithalamion for Thyrsis and Kala, found in the Third Eclogue of *Arcadia* (1593), illustrates "concern with discovering the proper sovereignty for the state, as marriage is for the home" and offers a "defense of marriage as a device in accord with Nature, designed that man may maintain his kind and preserve the commonwealth" (Tufte 153).

9. Dubrow suggests that the very act of writing an epithalamion implies that the institution of marriage can be "regulated, controlled and ordered by someone who assumes the authority to do so" (*Eden* 26-27).

10. The many years of struggle and discontent Donne suffered as the result of his marriage to Ann More attests to the Protestant's fear of and hatred for secretly made marriages.

11. While some Catholic theologians believed that the exchange of vows did not constitute a proper wedding until it had been sexually consummated, others, using the example of Mary and Joseph, claimed that only verbal consent was necessary. However, unconsummated unions could be dissolved if one partner chose to take holy orders or if the Pope granted dispensation (Ozment 26-27).

12. As Stone points out, "authoritarian control by parents over the marriage of their children inevitably lasted longest in the richest and most aristocratic circles, where the property, power and status stakes were highest" (*The Family* 184). Similarly, Wrightson suggests that among the aristocracy, parental domination of match-making was stronger in the marriages of daughters, because of their dowries, and of male heirs (73).

13. Although Thomistic Catholicism devalued women in many ways, female religious figures, such as the female saints and the Virgin Mary, were held in very high esteem.

14. Many feminist critics such as Heather Dubrow, Roberta Hamilton, Constance Jordan, and Linda T. Fitz claim that, in actuality, the Protestants did not do much to raise woman's status. Instead, they made women believe they were becoming more powerful in an attempt to make patriarchal oppression more palatable. Furthermore, while Protestants stressed the spiritual equality of the sexes, they continued to insist upon the woman's inferiority in every other aspect of existence. The numerous uprisings of women against patriarchal ideologies and Protestant divines who preached them attest to the fact that Protestants really did very little to change the position of women in society.

Chapter II

1. In his sermon preached for the marriage of Margaret Washington at St. Clement Danes, May 30, 1621, Donne compares her earthly (secular) marriage to both the marriage of the Church and Christ (spiritual) and that of the individual soul to God (mystical or eternal).

2. In this sermon, Donne writes of women,

> To make them Gods is ungodly, and to make them Devils is devillish; To make them Mistresses is unmanly, and to make them servants is unnoble; To make them as God made them, wives, is godly and manly too. (III:242)

3. The fact that this marriage song was not included in

those manuscripts which Grierson and Gardner call "Group I," made unwillingly by Donne at the request of Somerset just before Donne decided to take holy orders, suggests that Donne himself must have "considered the Lincoln's Inn epithalamion unworthy of inclusion because he felt that it lacked merit" (Novarr 255).

4. Lady Anne Clifford "remarked on how at the beginning of the reign 'there was much talk...how all the ladies about the Court had gotton such ill names that it had grown a scandalous place'" (Ashley 95).

5. For a complete description of the Inns environment and the types of literature popular there, see Marotti's *John Donne, Coterie Poet* 25-95. For a factual account of Donne's life at Lincoln's Inn, see Bald's *John Donne: A Life* 53-79.

6. The word "jollity" appears nowhere in Donne's poetry save this epithalamion and that written for the Princess Elizabeth (*A Concordance to the Poetry of John Donne*).

Chapter III

1. In the Renaissance, it was quite conventional to use the epithalamion to commemorate marriages which united nations. For instance, the main theme of John Lydgate's "balade" (1422), which is believed to have begun the epithalamic tradition in England, is "the hope that by means of marriage, harmony and peace may be attained between Holland and England" (Tufte 142). Similarly, the theme of William Dunbar's epithalamion, written in 1503 to celebrate the marriage of James IV of Scotland and Princess Margaret Tudor of England, seems to be political concord between two countries attained through the marital union of two persons (Greene, "The Epithalamion" 165).

2. For a full account of the festivities see Nichols' *The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities of King James the First.* Vol. 2. 536-624.

3. Aers writes that Donne "consistently perceived his self-identity in relation to his social circumstances and the upper class establishment in which he desperately sought incorporation" (52). Hence, he claims, in his letters to Sir Henry Goodyere, to be "nothing" and that he "dyed ten years ago" when referring to the loss of preferment he suffered as a result of his marriage to Ann More. Similarly, in one of his sermons, Donne writes that "idle and unprofitable persons; persons of no use to the...State," disrupt "the order that God hath established in this world" (VII:149). See also "An Anatomie of the World" (216-8), "Devotions upon Emergent Occasions" no. 5 "God himself would admit..." and no. 17 "No man is an Iland...".

4. Miller suggests that in celebrating weddings which took place in winter, it was conventional for a poet to insist that the bride or the groom or their union is a greater sun than the one in the sky, even at its zenith, in order to mitigate, or better still to capitalize upon, the unfavourableness of the season. Therefore, through his claims that the bridal couple is more powerful than the sun, Donne may be trying to compensate for the fact that the wedding took place in February. Donne also uses this technique in his epithalamion for the marriage of the Earl of Somerset (105-15), which took place in December.

5. This opinion of arranged marriage is also expressed in one of Donne's sermons:

> where the *In Domino*, *In the Lord*, is not to mary for matter of *Title* and place; nor, *In Domino*, in the Lord, is not to mary for matter of *Lordships*, and possessions, and worldly preferment; nor, *In Domino*, In the Lord, is not in hope to exercise a Dominion and a Lordship over the other party.... (VIII:103)

6. If Donne means "severall" in both senses of the word, "different" and "many," he may be making a very subtle comment on the extravagance and expense of the jewels of the Princess and her bridesmaids who looked like "a skye of caelestial starres [attending] upon faire Phoebe" (*Progresses* 544).

7. Carey suggests that Donne may have written the epithalamion in order to dissociate himself from or to offset the bad impression created by his patron Drury, who had spoken disparagingly of the Elector Palatine and his court (85).

Chapter IV

1. George Chapman wrote *Andromeda Liberata* or *The Nuptials of Perseus and Andromeda*, an "elaborate and tasteless allegory in defense of the marriage" in which Andromeda (Lady Frances), bound to a barren rock (Essex), to be the spoil of the sea monster (the savage multitude), is rescued by Perseus (Somerset) (Sheehan 68). In a subsequent work, Chapman insisted that the poem had been "maliciously interpreted"; however, "no lengthy justification could undo the harm he had already done by his reference to the people's condemnation of the divorce proceedings, and by the use of the unhappy adjective 'barren'" (McGowan 201-2).

2. While light, heat, and sun imagery was conventional, it was appropriate also because of the possible pun on the name Somerset, pronounced as "summer's heat."

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